The Specific Vulnerability of Religious Minorities

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2020

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

6. The vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* of the southwestern highlands of Colombia

This case study corresponds to an intra-ethnic (minority-within-the-minority) conflict. Specifically, this case study is about the vulnerability of converts from the majority religion in an indigenous context, which I refer to as 'cultural dissidents' among the Nasa ethnic group living in the *resguardos indígenas [indigenous reserves]* of the southwestern highlands of Colombia (Cauca and neighboring departments). The timeframe for this case study overlaps with the first six years of the Administration of President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón (2010-2016), roughly until the signing of the peace agreement with the FARC.

Although the FARC guerillas have historically been active in rural areas of Colombia and have been associated with persecution of (actively practicing) Christians, I do not discuss this in this case study. I only 'laterally' refer to the FARC when I discuss the accusations that some indigenous leaders would have collaborated with this insurgency.

This case study is unique for several reasons. As explained in chapter 2, most contributions in conflict theory focus on inter-ethnic conflicts, not intra-ethnic conflicts. Furthermore, this case study concerns a conflict that involves a strong behavioral component that is also understudied in conflict literature. Finally, it zooms in on a subnational area with a unique form of indigenous self-government that RFATs fail to observe because of their predominantly national focus. I expect most findings of this case study to be generalizable to other indigenous communities in Latin America and beyond where similar tensions arise, and more generally to cases where collective rights and individual religious rights are not sufficiently balanced. After describing the disregard for religious freedom in the Nasa resguardos indígenas as a context description for this case study (6.1), I move to the data collection (6.2) security risks and ethical challenges (6.3), the RM-VAT (6.4), followed by an evaluation (6.5).

6.1 The disregard for religious freedom in the Nasa resguardos indígenas

The history of religious freedom in Colombia parallels that of Mexico until the beginning of the 20th century, but where Mexico became a secular and anticlerical state in 1917, the Catholic Church kept many of its privileges in Colombia. This was not uncontested, as throughout the twentieth century there were important struggles between liberals and conservatives, including a civil war known as *La Violencia [The Violence]* that lasted from 1948 to 1958 (Gill 2008). The 1991 Constitution was a major turning point for the country in many respects, including for freedom of religion (Díaz Escandón 2009; Moreno Palacios 2009; Arboleda Mora 2011). Before 1991, Catholicism was the official state religion. After the 1991 Constitution, the separation between the Catholic Church and the state was finally implemented, and religious freedom was fully recognized (art. 19 of the Constitution, ratified by the 1994 religious freedom law).

The available data on Colombia collected by the RAS Project points to a univocal conclusion: government involvement in religion is limited, especially in comparison to Mexico. Not only has Colombia no official religion, the levels of religious discrimination and religious regulation are low. Putting some sporadic elements of favoritism of the majority religion aside, it can be concluded from this presentation of the RAS data that the relation between religion and state

is not putting any religious minority in a vulnerable position from a human security perspective. This statement holds true when observing the religious freedom situation at the national level, but completely ignores the atypical situation of the resguardos indígenas where religious freedom for minorities is not guaranteed. In this introductory description of the context, I first discuss the religious agenda of the cultural dissidents within the Nasa ethnic group (6.1.1), followed by the legal insecurity and religious tensions in the Nasa resguardos (6.1.2). I then offer some conclusions about the repression of cultural dissidents (6.1.3).

6.1.1 The religious agenda of cultural dissidents within the Nasa ethnic group

The Colombian statistical office has not recorded religious affiliation for two decades,[102] but according to recent estimates from the World Christian Database (2017), 95.1% of Colombians self-identify as Christians. However, it cannot be assumed that the religious composition at the national level is applicable to indigenous communities, which have a distinct sociological composition and religious history. According to religious history scholars González & González (2008) and Arboleda Mora (2011), the earliest incursion of Christianity among the Nasa were the efforts of Jesuit missionaries, who were strongly resisted. In 1905, Lazarist missionaries began to work among the Nasa, which had more success. This led to a blend of indigenous Nasa and Catholic beliefs and traditions. Protestant groups started to emerge among the Nasa in the 1930s.

Although the presence of Christianity in the Nasa territories has increased over time, it never reached the same proportions as at the national level of Colombia. The Joshua Project, a Christian organization that compiles religious data from various sources, estimates the total Christian population within the Nasa at 65%, with the remaining 35% adhering to "ethnic religions." (2016) According to the same source, the Christian population among the Nasa includes an Evangelical segment of 38%. In personal interviews, staff from Visión Agape, another Christian organization, estimated the number of Evangelical Christians among the Nasa at "around 10-15%", but is not able to give a justification for this estimate. It is likely that the majority of this group belongs to the *Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Nasa, ICEN [Christian Evangelical Nasa Church]*, which is the largest non-Catholic Christian organization in the Nasa territories. Other non-Catholic groups that have a presence in the Nasa territory are *Asociación Alianza Cristiana Indígena Páez Colombiana [Christian Indigenous Colombian Páez Alliance]*, *Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia [United Pentecostal Church of Colombia]* and *Movimiento Misionero Mundial en Colombia [Worldwide Missionary Movement in Colombia]*. Some of these groups eventually merged into ICEN.

Regardless of the exact percentage of Christians among the Nasa, which is objectively difficult to determine, there is an important distinction to be made between the Nasa that take part in the cultural and religious traditions of the community and those who do not. The former may or may not self-identify as Christians but have in common that they follow indigenous religious traditions, generally mixed with Catholic syncretism. The latter expressly reject these traditions, often after they convert to some branch of Evangelical Christianity. This minority group, which I identify in this chapter as cultural dissidents, is the focus of this case study. I argue this group possesses a specific vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses.

[102] Interview with Jaime Alberto Álvarez (2016).

I chose to identify this minority as cultural dissidents, because they involve Christians who, often after a conversion experience, decide to reject some tenets of the cultural and religious traditions of their community, but expressly declare they continue to identify as Nasa and as indigenous. Their dissent focuses almost exclusively on aspects of Nasa culture that they disagree with, but they effectively continue to share the same holistic worldview that characterizes their community and do not reject other elements of their indigenous heritage.

For most cultural dissidents, the behavioral response 'exit' is not an option, as is often the case in tribal contexts as Hirschman explains: "exit is ordinarily unthinkable, though not always wholly impossible, from such primordial human groupings as family, tribe, church, and state. The principal way for the individual member to register his dissatisfaction with the way things are going in these organizations is normally to make his voice heard in some fashion." (1970:76). In other words, because of their feeling of loyalty to their ethnic group, the only recourse for these cultural dissidents is 'voice.'

The majority of cultural dissidents join ICEN, a movement that follows the basic tenets of Evangelical Christianity. It was initially connected to various North American missions such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Arboleda Mora 2011; Ramírez Escobar 2015) but evolved into an indigenous fellowship with no international connections. Its teachings include an explicit rejection of what is referred to as 'pagan' religious practices.[103] The ICEN is a recognized religious association, as records of the Colombian Ministry of the Interior confirm, but these records do not contain statistics of its membership. ICEN was registered on 8 October 2009, in Páez, Cauca (ICEN 2014).

The North American missions to Nasa communities worked mainly in the 1970's and 1980's, which means that most adult Evangelicals at the time I did this research are first generation converts. In my interviews, some of them shared about their conversion experience. According to their reports, tensions within their community as a result of their conversion have always existed but intensified during the past decade when their activism increased, particularly with the rejection of the existing school system which they did not consider to be adequate for their children. The creation of private confessional schools and ultimately the creation of the *Organización Pluricultural de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia, OPIC [Pluricultural Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia]*, an interest group, contributed to increase tensions.

The sometimes aggressive rejection of their original faith by converts is consistent with a trend described in sociology of religion about first generation converts who tend to be very radical in their break with their own past and with pagan elements that are part of their culture (Steigenga & Cleary 2007; Kovic 2007; Jindra 2014), especially when they enter what Gooren calls the "confession phase" of their "conversion career" which comes after the "conversion phase", in which their religious participation increases and in which they start to adopt a strong "missionary attitude" towards non-members outside their group (Gooren 2007). It is easy to understand how such increased militancy can generate tensions, especially when the type of Christianity they adhere to encourages an uncompromising rejection of the "pagan" elements in their heritage (Casanova 2008), a point that was also made by a representative of a faith-based organization working in the region.[104]

[103] Interviews CO01, CO02 and CO03 (2015).
[104] Interview with CU15 (2016).

Although a large part of the beliefs of ICEN agree with Western expressions of Evangelical Christianity, ICEN members continue to be greatly influenced by the Nasa culture and worldview, in the sense that they do not segregate between the private and the collective, nor between the political and the religious, as is characteristic in indigenous culture (Pancho 2007). In fact, ICEN members are proud of their Nasa identity and continue to consider themselves as members of the Nasa ethnic group. What they complain about is that the majority of the Nasa infer that their conversion to Evangelical Christianity implies a departure from their indigenous identity. "We don't understand why we can't be indigenous and Christians at the same time", said one of their leaders.[105] In the mainstream indigenous worldview, however, it is considered that one ceases to be indigenous when one converts to another religion. This has serious implications, because from the indigenous perspective, it causes the harmony of nature (Mother Earth) to be distorted, leading to a greater risk of natural catastrophes and other negative effects (Pancho 2007; Drexler 2007; Escobar Alméciga & Gómez Lobatón 2010; Molina Bedoya 2010).

The view that all members of the indigenous community need to adhere to its worldview and follow its traditions can be qualified, to use Buijs's categorization, as an expression of a "unitaritarian" political conception (2013). "The danger of unity" in this case is evident through the violent repression of religious minorities. It is also a case of "assumption of singular affiliation" (Sen 2006) and a manipulation of identity that narrows it to the adherence to the same religion and culture (Schlee 2008). In a way, the cultural dissidents advocate for "pluralism", i.e. the conception that in a society there should be room for different perspectives, although their logic also has unitaritarian features, such as their sometimes aggressive approach to missionary activity as I describe in the threat assessment.

An alternative proxy for the number of cultural dissidents in the Nasa community is membership of the OPIC. According to a public statement of the OPIC issued in 2009, the organization has 24,693 members (OPIC 2009), which would represent around 17.8% of the total Nasa population. This number could not be independently confirmed, but it seems reasonable considering newspaper reports that counted "close to 10,000"[106] and "more than 6,000"[107] members of the OPIC who participated in a protest march in August 2012. Although the OPIC, which I discuss more in-depth in the threat assessment, is primarily an interest group, it mostly federates Christians who reject the authority of the *cabildos indígenas [indigenous governments]*. It is, nevertheless, an imperfect proxy for the number of cultural dissidents because not all people that can be considered as cultural dissidents are members of the OPIC; most members of the OPIC are cultural dissidents, but not all cultural dissidents are affiliated to this organization.

Although reliable data is hard to come by, what is most important is the distinction between 'traditional' Nasa and Nasa who are cultural dissidents. On the continuum of religious identity and behavior, cultural dissidents can be found in part of the category 'religious participation' but it is mainly through the categories 'religious lifestyle', 'missionary activity' and 'civic participation' that this minority group expresses its dissent.

Finally, as the distinction between a political and a religious organization is not pertinent to the worldview of the Nasa (Pancho 2007:59), it must also be noted that the distinction between the various forms of religious behavior is quite blurry in this context. Specifically, conversion to

[105] Interview with CO04 (2015).
[106] "Indígenas del Cauca, en contravía", *El Espectador*, 03/08/2012.
[107] "Indígenas de la OPIC marchan en Popayán", *Semana*, 02/08/2012.

another strand of Christianity or participation in ICEN gatherings can already be viewed as a political statement of rejection of the indigenous authority.

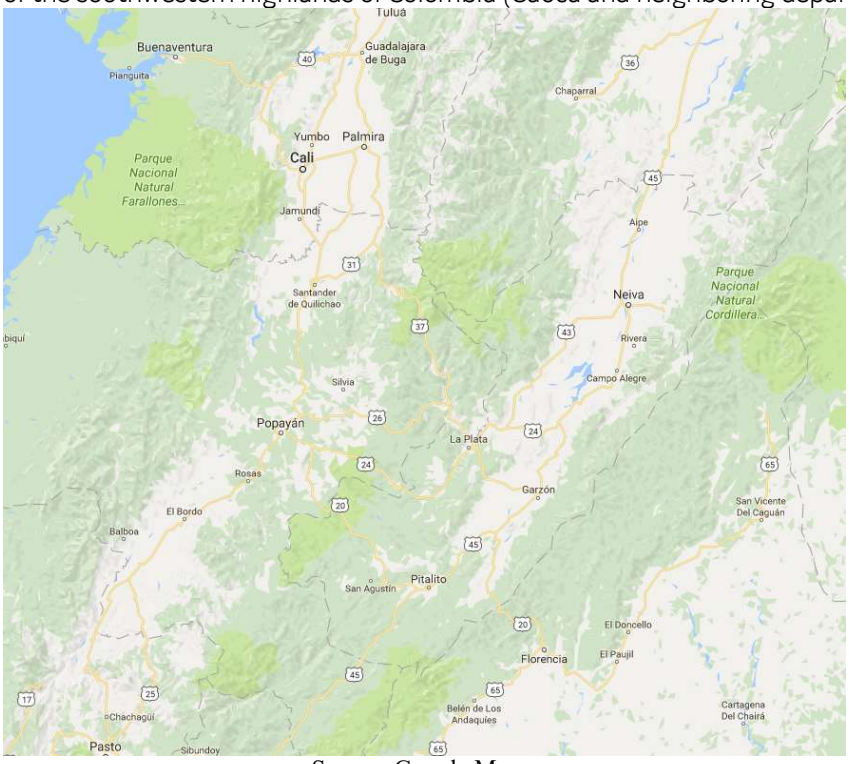
6.1.2 Legal insecurity and religious tensions in the Nasa resguardos

To further elaborate upon the plausibility of the inclusion of this case study in this research, in this section I consecutively describe the following elements of the selected subnational context to characterize its legal insecurity: the Nasa ethnic group, the political autonomy of the resguardos indígenas and evidence of human rights abuses.

The Nasa ethnic group

With around 138,501 members (as of 2007, *Departamento Nacional de Planeación de Colombia, DNP [National Planning Department of Colombia]*), the Nasa ethnic group, also known as Páez, is the second largest indigenous group in terms of size of Colombia. The Nasa live in 72 resguardos and 34 other types of indigenous communities, located in the southwestern highlands of Colombia in an area known as Tierradentro (see annex F). Most resguardos were created during the colonial era. The vast majority of the Nasa, 129,534 people, live in the Department of Cauca. Nasa also live in neighboring departments Caquetá, Huila, Meta, Putumayo, Tolima and Valle del Cauca (figure 6.1).

6.1 Map of the southwestern highlands of Colombia (Cauca and neighboring departments)



Source: Google Maps.

The Nasa are considered as an ethnic group with a relatively high degree of preservation of their original culture. The Nasa live in rural communities and work mainly in agriculture and

cattle raising. Weaving is an important activity for the Nasa, which connects to its mythology of the creation of the world. The belief system of the Nasa is built around a syncretic mix of catholic and indigenous traditions and symbols, such as *K'apish* – thunder (Rappaport 2004; DNP 2007). Although the mainstream religious beliefs of the Nasa include elements of Catholicism, the religion of the Nasa can more accurately be described as "a form of pre-Columbian religiosity with Catholic influences." When a member of the Nasa converts to Evangelical Christianity, this thus constitutes a very radical change.

The Nasa maintain their own language, called *nasa yuwe*, which belongs to the Páez linguistic family. The preservation of this language is highly significant to the identity of the Nasa and is intricately connected to its religion: "Nasayuwe, for the Nasa people, represents a matter of pride in their historical roots, respect for their culture and reverence for their belief system" (Escobar Alméciga & Gómez Lobatón 2010). To the Nasa, language is more than a mere "code system" for communication; it is a defining element of their worldview and truly a "fundamental attribute of self-recognition", to use Manuel Castells' perspective (1997). Therefore, the imposition of the Spanish language, western education and western religion since colonial times has been considered by the Nasa as a form of symbolic occupation (Molina Bedoya 2010).

The territory is equally essential to the Nasa cultural identity, in which religious and political life are intertwined: "According to 'traditional' Amerindian cosmological thought, 'territory' is not just a provider of natural resources but is also a space for political and medical-religious practices" (Drexler 2007:138). The importance of the protection of the territory of indigenous communities for the permanence and survival of the indigenous culture has repeatedly been acknowledged in Colombian jurisprudence (more on this below). As Drexler explains, this has important implications for the community's interpretation of religious conversion as contributing to "cosmic disorder and the accumulation of 'socio-cosmic filth'." Through the *Pta'zitupni* ritual – literally: "turning the filth around" – the harmony and equilibrium of the territory is restored. In the *Pta'zitupni* ritual the *Te'wala* (traditional doctor) also gives legal and ethical orientations to the elected governors, who are known as the cabildos indígenas.

The political autonomy of the resguardos indígenas

During the last decades of the twentieth century, indigenous movements emerged throughout Latin America. The demands of these movements went beyond the social inclusion of indigenous communities in the economic system. They demanded the recognition of group rights and ethnic determination (Yashar 2005:3-5). This unprecedented mobilization of indigenous groups, often referred to as *indigenismo*, had major political consequences. A milestone for the indigenous movement was the adoption in 1989 of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) "Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries", which formally recognized the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples, among other things (Yashar 2005:16).

Colombia ratified Convention 169 in 1990 and discussed indigenous rights in the 1990-1991 Constitutional Assembly (Carrillo-Flórez 2006; González 2011). This led to the first official recognition of the ethnic diversity of Colombia, as well as the granting of far-reaching self-administration rights. In a move aimed at preserving vanishing indigenous cultures, articles 246 and 330 of Colombia's 1991 Constitution grant indigenous groups autonomy in their own territories (Stavenhagen 2001, 2008, 2013; Van Cott 2005, 2008). A review of the legislation

regarding indigenous communities in Colombia confirms the far-reaching political autonomy that indigenous communities enjoy, which is, in the words of legal anthropologist Sánchez Botero, "really revolutionary" (2002).

The Colombian Constitution recognizes "indigenous territories" as a distinct type of territorial entity, alongside municipalities and departments (art. 286). (The majority of resguardos indígenas have acquired the status of indigenous territory in order to benefit from the legal prerogatives this implies. A smaller number of indigenous communities have the status of municipality.) The Colombian Constitution is not very specific about the government system of the indigenous territorial entities. It simply mentions that the indigenous authorities "may exercise jurisdictional functions within their territorial scope, in accordance with their own rules and procedures" (art. 246), that they are "governed by councils formed and regulated according to the uses and customs of their communities" (art. 330) and that they can be beneficiaries of public funds granted by the national government (art. 356). The competencies of the indigenous governments include the adoption and enforcement of legislative acts, economic policy, budget (including the faculty to raise taxes), management of public resources (including for education) and public order (through a *guardia indígena [indigenous guard]*). In addition, they have the faculty to implement their own justice system. This *fuero especial indígena [special indigenous jurisdiction]* includes the possibility to order punishments according to their own *usos y costumbres [customs and habits]*.

Each resguardo is thus given the freedom to adopt its own government system, according to its own traditions. Most Colombian resguardos, including the Nasa resguardos, are governed by a 'cabildo', which is a collegiate form of government that is comparable both to a council of elders and a municipal council, and is selected by the members of the resguardo. The cabildo combines executive, legislative and judicial power, but some legislative and judicial prerogatives are exercised by the 'general assembly' of all the inhabitants of the resguardo. Sometimes, the cabildo is presided over by a 'governor' but more often all members of a cabildo are referred to as governors. The particularities of the government system vary from resguardo to resguardo, and because it is mostly based on oral traditions, it is flexible and can be arbitrary. For example, it is unclear under which circumstances the general assembly should be consulted by the cabildo.

The Nasa cabildos that are located within the Department of Cauca are organized within a regional network called the *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, CRIC [Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca]*, which also has members who represent other indigenous communities. This association, created in 1971, is essentially a lobby organization for the social and cultural rights of the indigenous communities of the department and serves as an interlocutor to the Colombian government. The CRIC does not have legal authority over the cabildos, but its meetings serve to streamline the policies of the cabildos, particularly for matters related to the protection of their cultural heritage (Ramírez Escobar 2015). Often, the cabildos turn to the CRIC for legal and political support when they need to deal with issues that they consider threatening to the traditions and culture of the Nasa.

During my fieldwork, I did not encounter any noteworthy differences between the views of the cabildos of the different Nasa resguardos and the CRIC. They seem to be on the same line when it comes to matters related to the preservation of the traditions of the Nasa, but I was not exposed to any internal debates within these institutions. The only difference I was able to observe is that some cabildos seem to be more severe than others in the punishment of cultural dissidents, but this could also depend on the behavior of the latter. The general population of

the resguardos, either in day-to-day live or when gathered in general assembly, seems to always approve of the decisions of the cabildos toward cultural dissidents, but this could very well be the consequence of a certain authoritarianism; within the resguardos, there does not seem to be much room for freedom of expression, let alone political opposition.

The indigenous autonomy is far-reaching, but not absolute. The constitutional limitations on indigenous autonomy include the respect for the right to life, the prohibition of torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, slavery but also the principles of due process and legality in criminal matters, as well as the prohibition of forced displacement or confiscation of private goods or land – in sum, anything that goes against human rights and the Constitution. As I show further down, these limitations are, in practice, very difficult to enforce when they touch upon the rights of (religious) minorities within the resguardos. Formally, the Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and all laws and practices should be in conformity with it. At the same time, the Constitution institutes a special indigenous jurisdiction and the so-called principle of "non-admissibility due to socio-cultural diversity." (see annex G)

Human rights abuses in the resguardos indígenas

The far-reaching level of indigenous autonomy in Colombia is generally regarded as something positive (Sánchez Botero 2002; Yashar 2005; Stavenhagen 2008, 2011, 2013; Arlettaz 2011; Molina-Betancur 2012). Notwithstanding the wide support for indigenous self-determination, indigenous justice remains a controversial topic in Colombia.[108] Although, the existence of human rights abuses inside indigenous communities has received relatively little attention in legal scholarship, as observed by Scolnicov (2011) and Pinto (2015), some scholars have recognized the challenge to balance the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples and the individual human rights of people living in indigenous territories, particularly minorities (Kymlicka 1996, 2001; McDonald 1998; Jones 1999; Ghanea & Xanthaki 2005; Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev 2005; Ghanea, Walden & Stephens 2007; Casanova 2008).

In the Nasa community, there are records of human rights violations that were perpetrated by the indigenous authorities, not only against cultural dissidents (which I discuss in more detail in the threat assessment), but against ordinary citizens in general. For example, a person who had an extramarital affair was reportedly flogged as punishment,[109] a person who had endorsed the wrong presidential candidate was tortured,[110] collaborators with the FARC were whipped, including minors,[111] and a Christian leader was reportedly poisoned.[112]

It could be argued that these human rights violations can exist because of the existence of a legal situation that gives the ruling cabildos the authority to administer justice by applying traditional punishments, which under the normal Colombian jurisdiction would not be legal. This matter can also be interpreted in political terms, considering the weak capacity of the Colombian state to enforce the rule of law in remote rural areas. Indeed, beyond the legal authority of the cabildos, the geographical location of the resguardos in practice gives them much power and requires little accountability.

[108] "La justicia indígena que unió a los colombianos", *Semana*, 12/11/2012.
[109] "Colombian tribe whips cheating lovers", *Reuters*, 04/06/2000.
[110] Idem.
[111] "La justicia indígena que unió a los colombianos", *Semana*, 12/11/2012.
[112] "Indigenous Pastor Poisoned. Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia", Visión Agape, 16/03/2011.

The existence of the resguardos indígenas alongside the national government level could be interpreted as a particular case of "regime juxtaposition", to use the concept developed by Gibson (2005). Indeed, the resguardos and the national government are not only two levels of government that have jurisdiction over the same territory; they also operate under very distinct legal regimes: the former is based on indigenous customary law, the latter is based on western positive law. According to legal scholar Zegarra-Ballón, this situation of "legal pluralism", raises questions concerning "the legitimacy of indigenous self-government decisions and, in particular, the adequacy of their systems of administration of justice and the punishment of misconduct inside their communities. This is the case of the severe physical sanctions applied by the authorities of these human groups" (2015:96). In an article about domestic and other forms of gender violence in Nasa resguardos, Duarte, another legal scholar, acknowledges the legal tension that is caused by this situation of legal pluralism:

> "The Colombian State recognizes domestic violence as a crime and, at the same time, recognizes the jurisdictional autonomy of indigenous peoples. [This] raises the problem of domestic violence for the Nasa people and, in particular, their differences of perception with the State. [There is] a situation of legal pluralism and this pluralism creates confusions, tensions and questions for Nasa women, the Nasa people and the Colombian State." (2009:229)
>
> "The Colombian national legal system, of which the Nasa people, including Nasa women are part, has the responsibility to guarantee the rights of the people as well as of its members, but responds to this duty in a muddled way." (ibid. 241).

As Zegarra-Ballón warns, "The right to a special jurisdiction of indigenous peoples must not enter into conflict with the observance of human rights" (2015:96), in line with article 5 of the Vienna Declaration (2013).[113] Conflicts have arisen at a number of occasions, including cases involving religious freedom in which the imperative to protect the cultural identity of the indigenous community conflicted with the individual religious freedom of its members.

Although in this case study I focus on the Nasa, freedom of religion is a generalized issue in indigenous communities in Colombia. A review of relevant jurisprudence of the Colombian Constitutional Court and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights reveals that religious freedom is systematically used as an argument to protect the religious traditions of the dominant religion in indigenous communities (see annex H), linking it to other fundamental rights such as the right to culture and the right to property (Arlettaz 2011). In all cases, the fundamental right to cultural identity has taken precedence over the religious freedom of minority groups inside the indigenous communities (Nieto Martínez 2005; Lopera Mesa 2009).

For example, in sentence SU-510/98, a ruling about a case in which the right to freedom of religion is opposed to the right of the community to preserve its principles, beliefs and culture, the Colombian Constitutional Court let the right to religious freedom of the Arhuaca indigenous community prevail on the basis that its entire system of authority and way of life is closely

[113] "All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms."

linked to "a hermetic spiritual conception", implying that the arrival of another religion within the community can be denied and that this community has no obligation to guarantee freedom of religion.[114] Thus, in this sentence, the Colombian Constitutional Court declared it is legitimate to restrict religious freedom in indigenous communities in order to preserve their cultural identity. Specifically, minority religions are to be professed privately and religious proselytism (missionary activity) is considered a profanation of the "sanctuary" (this is how the territory of the resguardo indígena is viewed) and a threat to the subsistence of the indigenous peoples, and is therefore forbidden (Nieto Martínez 2005).

Later court rulings have confirmed this interpretation. For example, sentence T-659/2013 confirms the legitimacy of the decision of the authorities of a Nasa resguardo to expel Christian converts from their homes citing three reasons: the indigenous autonomy, the indigenous conception of "the transcendence of the indigenous territory for the members of these ethnic groups" and the sociological fact that indigenous territories are viewed as collective property.

As mentioned earlier, in all the relevant court cases the Colombian Constitutional Court has stated the caveat that there are constitutional limits to indigenous autonomy such as "the respect for the right to life, the prohibition of torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, slavery" and that indigenous jurisdiction must respect due process. The Court has also systematically interpreted indigenous autonomy in the broadest possible sense and has refrained from condemning religious freedom violations inside resguardos, asserting it does not entertain jurisdiction over these matters.

Nieto Martínez recognizes that although the rights of indigenous communities to preserve their cultural identity includes the dominant religious beliefs of this community, the conversion of members of an indigenous community to another religion poses challenges related to the protection of the religious freedom of this minority in a minority:

> "The greatest difficulty lies with the members of these communities, who for various reasons have changed their religion, and although the Constitutional Court has not hesitated to protect the right of indigenous peoples to the preservation of their cultural identity, the essential expression of these members must, as this entity has expressed, be allowed, under penalty of violation of the right to religious freedom and worship of a minority within another minority specially protected in the Political Constitution." (2005:283)

This finding is of relevance for the RM-VAT, because it implies that certain aspects of the religious freedom of religious minorities within the resguardos indígenas can be restricted in virtue of the imperative of preservation of the rights of indigenous peoples.

6.1.3 The repression of cultural dissidents

This context description provides all the necessary elements that justify an in-depth analysis of the vulnerability of the religious minority identified as cultural dissidents among the Nasa indigenous group, which is the second largest indigenous group in Colombia, and where incidents against religious minorities have been most visible in recent years, in part because of their social and political activism. With the selection criteria for my case studies as described

[114] Interview with Diego Alejandro López Chala (2016).

in section 4.3 in mind, I have presented evidence that confirms the plausibility of the vulnerability of this group to human security threats. I have done this by describing the religious agenda of the cultural dissidents and highlighting the points of conflict between that agenda and the cabildos' aim to preserve the Nasa culture. I have also discussed the complexity of the enforcement of religious freedom and other basic human rights in virtue of the far-reaching self-government faculties of the resguardos.

The cultural dissidents can easily be identified based on their self-identification as Christians, their expressed rejection of certain cultural traditions of the Nasa, and, for a majority of them, their militancy within the OPIC. They do not constitute a distinct ethnic group but are part of the Nasa indigenous family. The threats that I identify in the RM-VAT can thus be taken as a direct result of their religious identity and behavior.

The Nasa resguardos can be considered as a particular case of subnational undemocratic regime to the extent that the government system is not based on free elections but on customary procedures. In this legal context, the rights of minority groups within indigenous communities receive inadequate protection. Essential tenets of the rule of law, such as basic respect for human rights and due process, are not respected, although this is insufficiently recognized by legal scholarship which overlooks minority-within-the-minority types of conflicts.

As argued, the RFATs are generally silent on the position of cultural dissidents due to their national focus and their neglect of behavioral dimensions of religion. This case study can therefore complement the RFATs by contributing new findings based on original fieldwork in the Nasa resguardos. This case study can also give more substance to the existing claims of religious freedom violations in this community. The case of cultural dissidents among the Nasa provides a unique opportunity to observe the vulnerability of a religious minority within an indigenous community. Indeed, this is an authentic case of intra-ethnic conflict, involving serious threats to human security, including forced displacement and torture, as a result of religious conversion and certain types of behavior, including social and political activism.

The conflict opposing the cultural dissidents and the rest of the Nasa community is relatively uncluttered. The vulnerability of this group is the result of the way the cabildos indígenas respond to their changed religious identity and their resulting behavior, within the boundaries of their self-government faculties. This makes it possible to determine the specificity of the vulnerability of the cultural dissidents without running the risk of confounding it with other factors.

The analysis of cultural dissidents is also relevant from the perspective of the coping mechanisms this group has developed. The social and political activism of some of their representatives had the expressed aim to ensure the protection of their religious freedom and to promote their cultural agenda but seems to have had the opposite outcome. This case study therefore constitutes an opportunity to explore in which ways coping mechanisms can be counterproductive.

6.2 Data collection

During a trip to Bogotá in 2010, I was first exposed to the situation of Christian converts in the Nasa community, and have monitored and gathered information about this group in the following eight years. Applying the research design of the RM-VAT described in chapter 4, I

organized all available qualitative and quantitative data about the vulnerable religious minority that I identified as cultural dissidents under different human security threats.

In total, I carried out four research trips to Colombia: to Bogotá (27 November-5 December 2010), to Bogotá (30 April-4 May 2012), to Bogotá and the departments of Huila and Meta (25-30 January 2015), and again to Bogotá (6-12 August 2017) in which I interviewed over 40 people. During the visits to Bogotá, I met with representatives of the Colombian Ministry of the Interior, the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, academics, journalists, leaders of Christian denominations, NGO's and Members of Parliament. During the trip to Huila and Meta, I visited a settlement of Nasa who were displaced for religious reasons, a safe house for people who had fled various Nasa resguardos, and a boarding school for children from various 'persecution backgrounds', including children who had fled Nasa resguardos.

The interviewees can be categorized in two groups: people that were selected based on their knowledge of the situation of the Nasa resguardos – a sample of government representatives, development workers, church leaders, academics and lawyers – and people belonging to the Nasa ethnic group and who can be identified as cultural dissidents. I asked the interviewees belonging to the first group to list the threats for which they consider Nasa converts were vulnerable, and then to comment on them. I asked the interviewees belonging to the second group to share about the human rights abuses they had suffered from, the reasons for their displacement (when applicable), etc.

I conducted most interviews in Spanish but have translated quotes in the threat assessment into English. As in the previous case study, I did not record the interviews for practical and security reasons. I did take field notes, which I keep in a file for reference. Based on the interviews, I listed the most recurring threats in the threat assessment, categorizing them by sphere of society and the continuum of religious identity and behavior.

The interviews conducted during these trips are the primary sources for the case study. I also relied on internal reports of a number of Colombian charities including Visión Agape (a Colombian partner organization of Open Doors International, that has implemented projects among Nasa Christians since 2001), the Colombian Evangelical Council *[Consejo Evangélico de Colombia, CEDECOL]*, *Corporación Dios es Amor, CDA Colombia [Foundation God is Love]* and the Christian Mennonite Association for Justice, Peace and Non-Violent Action *[Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta, JUSTAPAZ]*.

I have also used some interviews and trip reports by Lía Salomé Sánchez, who was a researcher for Visión Agape between 2012 and 2014, with her permission (I have marked them with an asterisk in the footnotes), specifically interviews she conducted in resguardos in the Department of Cauca, including with members of cabildos, which I could not do myself (more in the next section). In addition, I reviewed the records of declarations of Nasa cabildos in court cases about religious freedom, as a substitute for personal interviews, which reflect their public position about the conflict with cultural dissidents.

Although I extensively used the reports of Christian organizations, I could not always consider them as unprejudiced sources because of their institutional agendas. At times, I reached a different conclusion than those reports. For example, I am skeptical about the claim that the cabildos have used FARC guerrillas to intimidate Christians. I also considered the representation of cultural dissidents as victims too partial, because, as I explain, their attitude has sometimes contributed to an exacerbation of the conflict. To avoid any bias, I

systematically contrasted the findings of Christian organizations with my own interviews, reports of non-Christian NGO's, independent media and academic sources. All sources are referenced in the subsequent sections and in the bibliography. In addition, the RM-VAT relies on an extensive analysis of Colombian legislation and jurisprudence regarding religious freedom in indigenous communities because of their relevance to understand the vulnerability of religious minorities in resguardos indígenas, as well as other sources such as newspaper articles, academic publications and personal testimonies collected by various Colombian NGO's. All translations of non-English sources are mine.

An important source for the threat assessment was the information provided by the OPIC. I interviewed Ana Silvia Secué and Rogelio Yonda, the two most prominent leaders of the OPIC, at length in 2010 and 2012, and have followed the reports of the OPIC since 2010. It is my personal assessment that the OPIC voices a number of legitimate concerns that can be independently confirmed by other sources (Ramírez Escobar 2015), however, the statements made by the OPIC were taken carefully and always contrasted with other sources, as it is an interest group that defends its political views, including their claims of freedom of worship and education, but also their rejection of the cabildos as legitimate political authority.

Part of my trips to Colombia were done as part of my role as consultant for various organizations including the Inter-American Development Bank (2008-2009), the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress (2010-2011) and CDA Colombia (2010), and later as researcher and operations manager of an international charity (2011-2015), which in 2015 included an audit of the humanitarian projects of Visión Agape with ICEN and other Nasa Christians who suffered forced displacement.

6.3 Security risks and ethical challenges

The conduct of most of the field research did not involve any noteworthy security risks. It was safe for me to conduct interviews in Bogotá. There were no particular security risks involved for the interviewees either, although some requested the interview or parts of the interview to be held off the record. For this reason, most interviewees quoted in the RM-VAT have been anonymized, unless they are well-known figures (such as high-ranking government officials, members of cabildos or the spokespersons of the OPIC) and explicitly agreed to be quoted.

The trip to the departments of Meta and Huila also did not involve particular security risks, although the presence of the FARC guerillas in parts of Huila in 2015 continued to be a factor that invited caution and the avoidance of certain areas. As a rule, I always followed the advice of locals. When I visited the safe house for people who fled the Nasa resguardo, I was told by the caretaker that indigenous cabildos of the area would almost certainly be informed of a visit of a foreigner, but that this would not constitute a security risk for them. The visit to a settlement of displaced Nasa Christians, which very much resembled a refugee camp, did not constitute a security risk because it was located outside the territory of the resguardos.

It cannot be completely discarded that some of the interviewees, particularly among the displaced Nasa, could have presented biased information because of possible expectations of financial or other types of support from me. The quantity of the interviews conducted at the settlement mitigated this risk. Moreover, I contrasted the information provided by the interviewees at the settlement with other sources.

At the time of my visit to the settlement, most men were away, working agricultural jobs in the area. Therefore, I interviewed mostly women, young children and elders. Still, sufficient men were interviewed. Some of these interviews at the settlement were challenging due to the limited knowledge of Spanish and education level of some members of the Nasa community, but nevertheless provided relevant information.

Because I spent more time in Huila, in the area around the towns of Neiva and La Plata, most interviews were conducted there. However, I am confident that the findings are generalizable to the whole of the Nasa community, which present important similarities, as is confirmed by other sources such as newspapers articles, reports of various charities, court cases I reviewed and the work of a small number of Colombian and international scholars.

At the advice of Visión Agape staff, I decided not to visit a resguardo indígena myself. There are no noteworthy security concerns when visiting a resguardo, but the cabildo must previously be informed about the purpose of any visit, and the names of the people I would meet with. I was not willing to accept this, because I did not think it would be wise to inform the cabildos about my research, and because visiting the homes of Christian converts inside a resguardo would likely have created some degree of trouble for them. As indicated, Visión Agape researcher Lía Salomé Sánchez did visit resguardos and spoke with both Christian converts and cabildo members, but she could only do this because she was able to establish contact with Christian cabildo members at the time. She later regretted her visit because it led some Christians in the resguardo to be questioned by the guardia indígena.

6.4 Assessment phase

In this section I argue that cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos, as defined above, possess a demonstrable vulnerability to suffer human rights abuses, and that this vulnerability has some degree of specificity related to their religious identity and behavior. I follow the three steps of the RM-VAT: threat assessment (6.4.1), specificity assessment (6.4.2) and resilience assessment (6.4.3).

6.4.1 Threat assessment

The far-reaching political autonomy and legal jurisdiction of the cabildos described previously is particularly relevant for this threat assessment, as it provides the background against which the empirical evidence of human security threats, obtained through personal interviews and complementary sources, can be interpreted. I listed the most recurring threats in figure 6.2, categorized by sphere of society and religious identity-behavior.

6.2 Threat assessment of cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos (Colombia)

Spheres of society	*Religious identity*	*Semi-active religious behavior*	*Active religious behavior*
Family sphere	1. Aggression as a result of conversion 2. Recruitment of youths into criminal organizations	*No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of semi-active religious behavior.*	7. Restriction of initiatives to establish Christian education
Church sphere	*No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.*	4. Violent assaults against church attenders	8. Violent assaults against people engaging in missionary activity
Social sphere	*No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.*	5. Reprisals for rejecting traditional indigenous education	7. Restriction of initiatives to establish Christian education
Business sphere	3. Exclusion of access to agricultural lands	3. Exclusion of access to agricultural lands	3. Exclusion of access to agricultural lands
Cultural sphere	*No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.*	6. Reprisals for refusing to participate in traditional indigenous rituals	*No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of active religious behavior.*
Government sphere	*No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere based on religious identity.*	*No restrictions on religious expression in this sphere as a result of semi-active religious behavior.*	9. Intimidation of members of interest groups 10. Intimidation to prevent political participation

Source: own elaboration.

In total, I identified ten distinct threats to which cultural dissidents are vulnerable. These threats are spread relatively commensurately on the continuum of religious identity and behavior, although it can be observed that the more active the religious behavior, the higher the vulnerability of this minority group. It must be noted that because of the holistic worldview of the Nasa, the distinction between spheres of society is not very meaningful as there is no strict separation between spheres.

Threats resulting from religious identity

Three of the ten identified threats result from religious identity. These threats are directly related to the identification of indigenous Christians with one of the Christian denominations, i.e. the mere belonging to this minority group is a factor of vulnerability. I cover the threat "Exclusion of access to agricultural lands" as a threat resulting from religious identity, although it may also be related to semi-active or active religious behavior.

Conversion to Christianity – understood as the conscious decision to abandon traditional indigenous religious practices, often after joining an Evangelical denomination – is a major cause of human rights abuses in the Nasa resguardos. Indeed, indígenas who convert to Christianity and abandon their ancestral beliefs face aggressive opposition. As Lía Salomé Sánchez, a researcher, explains: "In many indigenous communities, including the Arhuaca, Kogui and Nasa communities, converts to Christianity who subsequently reject their ancestral traditions are isolated, displaced, uprooted, threatened, punished and their fundamental rights are violated."[115]

Numerous examples of hostilities against Christians can be given, including cases of denial of health services, forced displacement and physical mistreatment.[116] In one case, a group of 139 indigenous Christians were required by indigenous leaders to sign a document renouncing their beliefs. If they refused, they would face violent consequences, including torture and exclusion of access to agricultural lands, a point I return to in threat 3. Overwhelmed by these threats, these indigenous Christians decided to sign the document, but some of them later decided to remove their names from it. In April 2013 they were forced to flee the resguardo and now live in makeshift tents in a village called El Pital made of wood and plastic on a piece of land where the owner of a farm lets them live temporarily. (I visited this refugee camp in January 2015 and spoke with the indigenous Christians living there.)

Such cases are part of a pattern. As a humanitarian worker reported: "In Cauca, almost every day there are cases of indigenous persecution. In recent days, houses of Christians were burned down and Christians were displaced. [I also] received a report that two believers are punished by the indigenous authorities with imprisonment for opposing their ancestral practices."[117] According to reports by the Violent Incidents Database of the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America, in the course of 2014, about 600 indigenous Christians were displaced from their homes – several of them imprisoned and tortured - with support from local authorities. Two churches were also destroyed in 2014. World Watch Monitor, a news outlet that reports about persecution of Christians worldwide, estimates that between 2015 and 2016, there were 108 incidents of harassment, torture, and violent displacements of Nasa Christians.[118]

Most of the people I interviewed view the human rights abuses in terms of religious persecution. A Nasa Christian reports:

> "We are persecuted. I am persecuted by the cabildos because I am the only one who belongs to the evangelical community. They will come to take me, take my cloths of and punish me in *cepo* and *fuete [traditional torture instruments]*. I told the cabildos that what they are doing is against the national Constitution.

[115] Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2014).
[116] "Julio Cuspian and family displaced by indigenous local authorities", Violent Incidents Database (www.violentincidents.com); "127 displaced indigenous forced to leave the territory where they were", Violent Incidents Database (www.violentincidents.com); Visión Agape internal report, September 2010; Visión Agape internal report, October 2010; Visión Agape internal report, February 2011; "Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia", Visión Agape, 16/03/2011; "Colombia: Here one feels safe…!", Visión Agape, 21/11/2011; Trip report by CO10, Visión Agape staff, 8-11 July 2014.
[117] Interview with Miguel Pérez (2012).
[118] "Church and indigenous Nasa people build Colombia's future together", *World Watch Monitor*, 08/09/2017.

> The land of the Evangelical community of Montecruz, where we used to work to support our community was taken away from us. The indigenous guard arrived on 10 April to banish us. I told the cabildo they could not attack an innocent person without looking at his record. But they said that the political Constitution is for the whites. They said that indigenous law is the only thing that is of worth. I told them: you understand that as Evangelical indígenas we have rights, but they say that churches need to be taken away and that we must be left outside. Now they only create violence."[119]

This interpretation is echoed by Ramírez Escobar, a scholar at a university in the Department of Cauca, who explains that the Nasa culture wants to preserve itself and continue to differentiate itself from other cultures. The conversion of some of its members to Evangelical Christianity distances them from this ideal, because it makes them look like the western 'colonial' culture that it rejects (2015).

Threat 2: Recruitment of youths into criminal organizations

During the armed conflict between the FARC and the Colombian government, the cabildos were in a complicated and delicate position. Several sources report that FARC guerrillas with some frequency entered indigenous resguardos to provision themselves and to find new recruits, including children. Because of the poverty and high levels of unemployment, many youths were persuaded to join the guerrillas.[120] The FARC were also reported to have taken advantage of the institutional weakness of the cabildos and the fact that inside the resguardos they were safe from national security forces (police and military) who are not allowed to enter them in virtue of the indigenous autonomy (Ulloa 2010; HRW 2013).

At times, some cabildos may have actively collaborated with the FARC, granting them access to the resguardos or participating in drug trafficking activities, in return for benefits,[121] but the Nasa cabildos have also voiced their opposition to the recruitment of youths (HRW 2013:215). For example, they petitioned both the Colombian Constitutional Court and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to request the assistance of the state to protect their community and their leaders against the threat of the internal armed conflict.[122] The Nasa have also sentenced the guerrillas in its own justice system.[123] Sandoval Forero (2008) describes that one of the main purposes for the creation of the Nasa indigenous guard was precisely to protect the community against the intrusion of guerrillas and other armed groups. Duarte (2009:237) and Pancho (2007:60), an anthropologist and a Nasa herself, cite the armed conflict and specifically the recruitment of youths as a threat to the preservation of the Nasa culture.

In 2012, the cultural dissidents, through the *Organización Pluricultural de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia, OPIC [Pluricultural Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia]* denounced in the press that the *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, CRIC [Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca],* the regional network of indigenous cabildos,

[119] Interview with CO05 (2012).
[120] Interview with CO06 (2012).
[121] Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2013).
[122] T-025/2004, Corte Constitucional de Colombia; T-030/2016, Corte Constitucional de Colombia.
[123] "La justicia indígena que unió a los colombianos", *Semana*, 12/11/2012.

collaborated with FARC guerrillas and have used the FARC to intimidate Christians.[124] Some of my interviewees also expressed their suspicion that FARC guerrillas have established alliances with cabildos, accusing the cabildos of using FARC guerrillas to intimidate Christians.[125] One reports states, for example, that on 17 December 2010, "Medardo Caldono, a councilman, was killed in Mera by the FARC-EP by order of the CRIC in the department of Cauca, due to his participation in the creation of the Pluri-ethnic Indigenous Organization of Cauca (OPIC)."[126] A group of Christians, who were expelled from the Belalcázar resguardo in April 2013 claim the guardia indígena requested the assistance of the sixth front of the FARC to forcefully evict them from their homes.[127] Ana Silvia Secué, an indigenous school teacher who has set up Christian schools in indigenous communities, shares the following story:

> "One time, guerillas stormed into my classroom and took children to recruit them for their groups. Indigenous leaders had given them permission to do that. I never saw those children again. But I never give up and always continue and set up another school."[128]

I have not been able to confirm the veracity of the accusations of such alliances between the CRIC and the FARC. This being said, it is not unlikely that Protestant Christians inside the resguardos have suffered persecution at the hands of the FARC, regardless of the question whether the cabildos have been accomplices of these assaults. The intimidation and sometimes violent persecution of especially Protestant Christians by the FARC has been widely documented (Justapaz 2006; Open Doors International 2012; Arboleda Mora 2011:124-129) and is confirmed by interviews I conducted.

Threat 3: Exclusion of access to agricultural lands

According to article 329 of the Colombian Constitution, land in the indigenous territories is collectively owned and subject to decisions of its authorities. Access to agricultural land is granted by the cabildos, who administer community resources. Exclusion of access to agricultural lands is a major human security threat that cultural dissidents face, because it implies they can no longer provide for their livelihood. Because of its severity, I discuss it as a separate threat, although it is normally a consequence of religious identity (conversion), semi-active (church attendance) or active behavior (missionary activity and membership of the OPIC).

A high-profile case is the one of Jaime Tenorio Eudil who was convicted under false charges including an attempted murder – false, according to my interviewees – in April 2010 and sentenced by the indigenous council of Mosoco Páez Belalcázar, a resguardo in the Department of Cauca, to twenty years in prison. After a few months in a traditional prison, he was transferred to a jail in Popayán, leaving a large family behind with virtually no income after

[124] "Opic denuncia infiltración de las Farc en movimiento indígena del Cauca", *El País*, 19/07/2012; "La Opic denuncia que indígenas del Cauca tienen vínculos con las Farc", *W Radio*, 19/07/2012; "The Indigenous Women of Cauca's Nasa People", *Visión Agape*, 17/06/2012; "Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia", *Visión Agape*, 16/03/2011.
[125] Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué (2010), Lía Salomé Sánchez (2012) and CO07 (2013); "¿Por qué son perseguidos los indígenas cristianos en Colombia?", *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 12/11/2014.
[126] "Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia", *Visión Agape*, 16/03/2011.
[127] Trip report by Lía Salomé Sánchez, Visión Agape staff, 3-7 February 2014.
[128] Interview with Ana Silvia Secué (2010).

his land was also confiscated.[129] There are, however, many more examples, which I discuss more extensively in my commentaries about threats 1, 4, 8 and 9. Exclusion from access to agricultural lands, in combination with forced displacement, constitutes the most common tactic of the cabildos to discourage the conversion of cultural dissidents or punish them for their resulting behavior.

Evidence for this threat can also be found in a lawsuit that was presented by the OPIC, a lobby group created by some cultural dissidents, in 2013, demanding compensation for the forced displacement of some of its members.[130] Although this lawsuit was lost, some cultural dissidents had privately obtained some land several years before. In most disputes about access to land the cabildos are confirmed in their decisions.

Notwithstanding the severity of this threat, the frontal attacks by cultural dissidents against the cabildos can also be seen as a provocation, for example when the latter are accused by the former of confiscating land of Christians. What typically happens is that after a family converts to Christianity (and often joins the OPIC), the cabildos order them to leave their land. The cultural dissidents then accuse the cabildos of displacing the family from its property, to which the cabildos reply, as they do in every court case: "within the conception of Nasa territory, this is a whole and the improvements that are made are understood as part of it, and therefore are collective property; in accordance with the Constitution, indigenous lands are collective, inalienable, imprescriptible and indefeasible."[131] In such cases, one could indeed ask the question who the aggressor is. Is it the cabildos, who take away land from converted Christians, or is it the converted Christians who disregard the collective nature of property rights? From a legal perspective, the cabildos are, in fact, in their right when it comes to the administration of collective land, as has been confirmed by the courts. This being said, if the confiscation of land involves acts of violence, this is of course not justifiable.[132]

Threats resulting from semi-active religious behavior

I categorized three threats as resulting from semi-active religious behavior. Religious identity still plays a role in these threats, but the factor leading to the vulnerability of indigenous Christians is related to various aspects of religious participation and religious lifestyle.

Threat 4: Violent assaults against church attenders

Although conversion away from traditional religion is an important cause of many of the hostilities experienced by cultural dissidents as argued in threat 1, regular church attendance is a specific threat that puts indigenous Christians at risk of violent assaults. I have collected evidence that church services in the Nasa resguardos have been violently disturbed and

[129] "The Gospel keeps me free in jail: Jaime Tenorio", *Visión Agape*, 06/11/2013; "Jaime Tenorio Sends Thanks From Jail", *Visión Agape*, 04/02/2014; "'Quisiera irme de aquí': Marleny de Tenorio", Visión Agape, N/D.
[130] Sentencia T-659/2013, Corte Constitucional de Colombia.
[131] Sentencia T-659/2013, Corte Constitucional de Colombia.
[132] Interview with José Refugio Arellano Sánchez (2016).

explicitly targeted. Semi-active religious behavior has also led to severe consequences, including beatings and forced displacement.[133]

Anecdotal evidence suggests there is a pattern of systematic attacks on properties that are used to hold church services by community leaders, who visibly oppose church services from being held. This pattern has also been confirmed by many interviews I conducted. In an interview with María Teresa Mesa, who was evicted from her community and now runs a safe house for persecuted Nasa Christians in a nearby town, said that "the only possibility to reach an agreement with the cabildos is for us to stop holding church services."[134]

Statements by other interviewees confirm this threat. Leaders of churches are threatened if they continue to organize services: "If Christians continue to meet in houses, we will bring down the roofs and walls of houses where they meet, the house where they put the children also are going to be knocked down", they reported[135] A pastor informs that organizing Christian gatherings after sundown has been forbidden to him (he pragmatically organized services during the day).[136] A female Nasa shared that her church in Taravira, Cauca, was ordered to close, and that the lands of all people who were in that service were confiscated.[137] In a church in Nátaga, musical instruments and church pews were reportedly confiscated by the CRIC, when the church started to grow to around 120 people.[138]

Threat 5: Reprisals for rejecting traditional indigenous education

One of the main changes in the behavior of Nasa converts to Christianity is their almost systematic rejection of what they refer to as 'traditional indigenous education', which they equate to 'witchcraft' and consider 'pagan.' Most converts express their conviction that traditional indigenous education is contradictory to and incompatible with the Christian faith. It is here that the description 'cultural dissidents' is particularly relevant, as the conversion implies an explicit condemnation of one of the core elements of the cultural identity of the Nasa, which is very dear to Nasa leadership as it is one of the instruments they use to preserve the Nasa cultural identity, as explained above. Here, I show that this rejection is often met with widespread hostility, including violent reprisals against the parents who refuse their children from receiving this form of education.

Molina-Betancur argues that indigenous autonomy in the field of education is very advanced, yet still insufficient, particularly with regard to the administration of resources (2012). Cultural dissidents, however, regard the political autonomy of the resguardos as a limitation of the freedom of education. Specifically, Nasa converts complain there is no possibility to opt out of the mandatory indigenous curriculum, in which "pagan" elements are included.[139]

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[133] Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2015); "Indigenous Believers Continue to be Threatened by the Authorities", Visión Agape, 09/10/2014; Trip report by CO10, Visión Agape staff, 8-11 July 2014; "Indigenous authorities continue threatening believers in Huila", Violent Incidents Database (www.violentincidents.com).
[134] Interview with María Teresa Mesa (2014).
[135] Interview with CO10 (2015).
[136] Interview with CO08 (2014).
[137] Interview with CO09 (2014).
[138] Interview with María Teresa Mesa (2014).
[139] Interviews with CO08 and Hermes Pete* (2013).

The opposition against traditional indigenous education is led by the OPIC, but is also an integral element of the beliefs of most cultural dissidents: "The OPIC has opposed the content and methodologies used in classrooms, mainly because they are taught to practice witchcraft rituals, getting drunk and denying the existence of the Christian God", explained one interviewee.[140] I collected evidence of human rights abuses (including physical assaults and forced displacement) suffered by cultural dissidents as a result of their refusal to teach the expected primary education curriculum.[141]

Jaime Tenorio Eudil, the community leader mentioned before, started opposing the religious education curriculum and corruption within his Nasa indigenous group after his conversion, which had severe consequences, according to a press report: "Nasa schools teach children magic rituals and deny state benefits to tribal Christians, offering indigenous identity only to those who worship traditional gods. Jaime's [colleagues in the cabildo]'s response: accusing him of murder and sentencing him to 20 years in prison without possibility of appeal."[142]

Again, this anecdotal evidence suggests there is a pattern of persecution of converts to Christianity who oppose traditional indigenous education. The hostility of indigenous leaders against cultural dissidents is understandable. By rejecting traditional education, they reject an element that is considered to be essential to the preservation of the Nasa culture, which Nasa leaders are desperately trying to protect. Moreover, the uncompromising and judgmental attitude of cultural dissidents generates friction and can easily be regarded as an insult by the authorities.

However understandable, the fact that indigenous leaders resort to violence, directly threatening the human security of cultural dissidents, is a source of concern. It seems almost impossible to find some middle ground between both parties. Some interviewees do mention they have tried to promote alternative options such as "education based on a Christian indigenous worldview", but that this was also met with hostility by indigenous leaders, in part because of the perceived provocations by other Christian converts.[143]

Threat 6: Reprisals for refusing to participate in traditional indigenous rituals

Cultural dissidents who reject traditional indigenous education generally also refuse to take part in traditional indigenous rituals (including traditional medicine), which they deem incompatible with their newly adopted Christian faith. Some interviewees agree there is a difference between 'traditional medicine', such as healing through plants, and 'witchcraft.'[144] As is the case with the threats described above, the refusal of indigenous Christians to participate in traditional indigenous rituals, or to financially contribute to them, is met with violent reprisals. In my interviews and in various press reports, Nasa Christian women complained regularly about the public school system in the resguardos in which children are required to learn about "indigenous rituals related to witchcraft" and the following opposition from the indigenous authorities.[145] One woman said: "We [Christian women] teach them [their

[140] Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2014).
[141] Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2014); Visión Agape internal report, February 2011; "Writing Campaign for Displaced Women in Colombia", Visión Agape, 10/05/2015.
[142] "Indigenous Christians falsely accused for their faith remain hopeful", *World Watch Monitor*, 02/04/2013.
[143] Interviews with CO08, Hermes Pete* (2013) and Lía Salomé Sánchez (2014).
[144] Interview with María Teresa Mesa (2013)
[145] "The Indigenous Women of Cauca's Nasa People", *Visión Agape*, 17/06/2012

children] that God exists, but this bothered them [the indigenous leaders] because they are clinging onto their rituals, their customs. But the children welcomed it. We teach the children that the dignity of a person is that he is created in the image and likeness of God, not that he drinks *chicha [traditional alcoholic drink used in religious ceremonies]*, and that annoyed them."[146]

Similarly, a female indigenous leader of a small Christian church, explained: "We are being persecuted for being members of the OPIC, because the cabildos force us to take part in rituals and witchcraft; not only do they take away from us what we are entitled to by the state, but they also want us to go to the traditional doctors and do things that are against the Bible."[147] This concern is shared also by Christian converts who did not join the OPIC, like Pastor Hermes Pete, who has tried to dialogue with the cabildos. He also denounced the pressure the indigenous leaders put on Christians who no longer wish to participate in the traditional rituals.[148] The violence suffered by Jaime Tenorio and his family, described above, is also a direct consequence of his refusal to participate in traditional indigenous rituals.[149] This report was confirmed to me by Ferney Tenorio, Jaime Tenorio's son, whom I interviewed in 2015, as well as by Visión Agape staff who visited him in prison.[150] Jaime Tenorio's punishment for refusing to take part in traditional religious activities might seem very extreme – it could also involve other factors that were not revealed to me – but the opposition to cultural dissidents in this realm is a pattern in other interviews as well.

In the Nasa community, rituals are more than just an optional religious or cultural practice, but an integral element of daily life and therefore of Nasa identity. As stated earlier, the preservation of the Nasa identity is very dear to most indigenous leaders, which is why their opposition to cultural dissidents is to some extent understandable. Yet, the degree of violence they use might conceal a deeper frustration. Indeed, the rejection of traditional rituals and traditional medicine is regarded as subversive by the indigenous leaders. In Lía Salomé Sánchez's interviews with cabildos it becomes apparent that refusals to take part in important activities of the community of Christian converts is considered as "contempt of authority" (loss of face, in other words).[151]

Moreover, many cultural dissidents – not only members of the OPIC – frequently complain that the cabildos abuse the funds they receive from the Colombian state for community development projects which instead they use to "chew coca" and to "drink *aguardiente [alcoholic drink]*."[152] I was not able to confirm the veracity of this accusation, but the fact that this accusation is made, combined with the attachment of the indigenous authorities to respect and obedience to their leadership, could be an additional explanatory factor of the violent reprisals of indigenous authorities. Hermes Pete confirms that such accusations "create a conflict with the indigenous authorities."[153]

[146] Interview with María Teresa Mesa (2013).
[147] Interview with CO22 (2013).
[148] Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).
[149] "Colombia's indigenous believers denounce abuses in Open Doors Forum", Visión Agape, 12/17/2012.
[150] Interviews with CO10, Ferney Tenorio and CO23 (2015).
[151] Interviews with CO11, CO12, CO13* CO14, CO15 and CO16 (2013).
[152] Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013) and CO17 (2013).
[153] Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).

Threats resulting from active religious behavior

Four threats to which indigenous Christians are vulnerable result from active religious behavior, which in this case relates to both missionary activity and various forms of civic participation.

Threat 7: Restriction of initiatives to establish Christian education

Threat 5, which was classified under 'semi-active behavior', discussed the violence as a consequence of the opposition to traditional indigenous education. Here, I look at the human security threats that result from initiatives to establish Christian schools against the will of the indigenous leaders. As a general observation, the initiatives to establish Christian education – confessional schools that are independent from indigenous public schools – are a cause of human security threats for cultural dissidents in a similar way to other forms of religious behavior such as conversion, church attendance or missionary activity (threats 1, 4 and 8, respectively). The establishment of confessional schools is also the main agenda item of the OPIC, which I discuss extensively in threat 9.

In fact, any form of non-traditional education, including Christian education, is opposed by Nasa leaders who require all indigenous children to be educated in pre-Columbian customs and traditions. The evidence I collected points in the direction that setting up alternative confessional schools is not appreciated by the indigenous authorities. Those who engage in such initiatives, whether they belong to the OPIC, ICEN or operate independently, are vulnerable to severe human security threats. There are numerous cases in which the people that create or serve in Christian educational institutions are denied access to water and health services, physically attacked, imprisoned, tortured, displaced and sometimes killed as punishment. School buildings are subject to arson attacks.[154]

Again, the main reason for the hostilities of the cabildos against cultural dissidents who try to establish their own schools is that confessional schools are considered a threat to the indigenous culture. Political economy considerations play a role too, in line with rational choice-based interpretations of conflict presented in chapter 2. Indeed, control of education is not only an instrument to transmit cultural traditions to future generations, it is also a means to access financial resources from the central government. At present, the authorities of the resguardos administer these resources, but the OPIC say it is entitled to part of the funds to establish schools according to their principles, as a representative of a Christian NGO explained.[155] Ana Silvia Secué, OPIC's main spokesperson and advocate for Christian education, declared that the main reason for the persecution Christians suffer is because they started to establish Christian schools:

> "That's when the cabildos began to create trouble. The CRIC signs an agreement every year with the Department of Education for the total number of indigenous children in Cauca, they receive that money, and now it must be over

[154] Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué (2012), CO18, CO09, CO19, CO20 (2013) and with several children who used to go to schools that were destroyed by indigenous authorities (2015); "Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia", Visión Agape, 16/03/2011; "Colombia: Indigenous authorities capture Christians in Cauca", *World Watch Monitor*, 15/04/2013; "The Hope School under Arrest", Visión Agape, 06/09/2016.
[155] Interview with Lía Salomé Sánchez (2013).

> of $2 million [Colombian pesos]. This year it should be even more, and with that money they pay the teachers and buy everything the schools need. When we began pulling children out from their schools the whole problem started."[156]

In the Nasa community, confessional education also seems to be a symbolic issue. As was indicated earlier, the separation between the government and church (religious) spheres is not part of the Nasa indigenous worldview. This means that setting up a confessional school goes beyond the school itself. The school becomes a cultural center, is used to organize church services and the land around the school is used as agricultural land. As such a confessional school very easily becomes a symbol of subversion against the authority of the cabildos.[157]

From a legal perspective, it is unclear what the precise scope is of the autonomy of the resguardos in terms of education – there is a legal silence about it, as a number of laws that should regulate the constitutional provisions about this topic has not yet been adopted (Molina-Betancur 2012) –, but the human rights abuses like the ones referenced above as punishment for violating a supposed right to educational autonomy do not have any legal basis.

Threat 8: Violent assaults against people engaging in missionary activity

The conducted interviews suggest that missionary activity causes Christians to be threatened and assaulted in most indigenous communities, including in Nasa resguardos.[158] Although there is no reference to the vulnerability of indigenous Christians in the US State Department *International Religious Freedom Report*, it could be deduced from the following that their religious practice is in effect restricted in indigenous territories:

> "The government generally permits missionaries to proselytize among the indigenous population, provided the indigenous community welcomes proselytism and visitors do not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands. A Supreme Court ruling stipulates that no group may force religious conversion on members of indigenous communities" (2013).

The Constitutional Court ruling referred to here is sentence SU-510/98, which I already discussed. As explained, this ruling basically indicates that some religious rights may, under specific circumstances, be restricted if this is necessary to preserve and protect the traditions of the indigenous community. This is a reality in most indigenous communities of Colombia, including in Nasa resguardos. Reports by Visión Agape confirm that missionary activity "constitutes a risk" that "frequently occurs in the Arhuaca, Nasa and Kogui communities."[159]

According to statements of the cabildos in court cases, they consider missionary activity as an affront to indigenous traditions, and they therefore see it as legitimate to restrict this activity, and to punish whoever engages in it. The fact that missionary activity – simply presenting the

[156] Interview with Ana Silvia Secué and Rogelio Yonda (2013). María Teresa Mesa later confirmed this (2015).
[157] Interview with José Refugio Arellano Sánchez (2016).
[158] Interviews with CO17, Pedro Santiago Posada* (2013), Lía Salomé Sánchez, María Teresa Mesa and Evangelista Quebrada (2014); "Indigenous Pastor the Victim of Witchcraft in Cauca", Visión Agape, 10/07/2014; "A missionary translator of the Bible is threatened", Violent Incidents Database (www.violentincidents.com).
[159] Visión Agape internal report, September 2015.

Christian faith – is not the same thing as forcing religious conversion, does not seem to make any difference. A pattern thus emerges: missionary activity is not desired by indigenous leaders in Nasa resguardos, and can lead to violent reprisals, including physical violence and forced displacement.

While I assess the testimonies I collected as trustworthy, I must mention that I also interviewed pastors in Nasa communities who say there are no restrictions on missionary activity in the resguardos where they live, and that they have a good relationship with the cabildos. It seems therefore that the restrictions and following violence against indigenous missionaries are not a reality in all Nasa resguardos and depend on the nature of the relationship of the cultural dissidents with the cabildos, as well as on the coping mechanisms they adopt. As I discuss further down, when 'social wisdom' is lacking, missionary activity is sometimes viewed as a provocation. Indeed, many of these missionaries do more than just 'share the gospel'; they also criticize the cabildos, sometimes using quite aggressive language. As one Christian missionary confessed: "They are upset because we [Christian missionaries] remind them [the cabildos] of the money transfers they earn which they spend on witchcraft and other filthy things they do."[160]

There also seems to be a difference between indigenous and non-indigenous missionaries. The restrictions on missionary activity initially applied only to non-indigenous missionaries visiting the resguardos, but were extended to indigenous missionaries in recent years. Restricting the access of foreign missionaries also seemed to be a 'policy' of the FARC guerrillas in the territories under their control, which included many Nasa resguardos.[161] Under these circumstances, when cultural dissidents refuse to comply, they can expect reprisals.

Threat 9: Intimidation of members of interest groups

In this section, I describe the threats – various forms of intimidation and other violent assaults – resulting from membership of interest groups. In the Nasa resguardos, the main interest group cultural dissidents are part of is the OPIC. This association was formally founded in 2009 by Ana Silvia Secué and Rogelio Yonda, both Evangelical Christians belonging to the Nasa ethnic group, in opposition to the CRIC, which federates the cabildos of the resguardos of the Nasa and other ethnic groups in the Department of Cauca. The members of the OPIC are mostly Evangelical Christians who reject the authority of the cabildos. The OPIC openly denounces and rejects the policies of the CRIC, particularly the restrictions it places on missionary activity, alternative confessional education and participation in traditional religious celebrations.[162] The OPIC describes itself as a "cry of independence [from the CRIC]" representing "thousands of indigenous people who disagree with the CRIC and refuse to submit to its philosophy and parameters." (OPIC 2009).

As can be expected, the relationship between the CRIC and the OPIC is hostile.[163] The CRIC has sued the OPIC for violating indigenous autonomy, accusing it of constituting a threat to the indigenous culture. The mere existence of the OPIC is contested by the CRIC. In the legal complaint the CRIC filed against the OPIC, the former argues that the latter is disrespectful "of

[160] Interview with CO17 (2013).
[161] Interviews with CO21 and CO20 (2013).
[162] Interview with Leonardo Rondón (2010).
[163] "Prensa promueve sentimientos de racismo, segregación e intransigencia ciudadana en el Departamento del Cauca", *Plataforma Colombiana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo*, 19/07/2012.

the fundamental rights of ethnic, cultural and social diversity, of autonomy and self-government, of education that respects and develops the cultural identity, physical and cultural survival that belongs to a proper or special indigenous jurisdiction." Among other things, the OPIC is accused of planning to create new resguardos outside the existing ones, rejecting "rituals, traditional medicine, spirituality and the worldview practiced by members of the CRIC", and "adopting or converting to the Christian faith and religion without consulting nor receiving authorization from any indigenous authority."[164] Membership of the OPIC has led to persecution of its members. This can clearly be seen from the demands placed by the cabildos upon OPIC members that had been previously imprisoned and beaten: they would be released upon the condition that they would withdraw from the OPIC.[165]

In the following, I give a few examples of members of the OPIC that have suffered abuses at the hands of the CRIC, including kidnappings, death threats and violent assaults. In one case, OPIC members presented legal charges against the cabildos to denounce that "four families of the indigenous community of the Villa de Itaibe Páez Cauca and Huila were abused for belonging to the OPIC association; their freedom of worship was restricted."[166] The case went up all the way to the Colombian Constitutional Court, who upheld previous jurisprudence about the precedence of indigenous jurisdiction. The defendant in the case, the Governor of the cabildo, denied the claim that the freedom of worship of Christians had been restricted in any way, but acknowledged that the families were ordered to leave their homes. He explained that this was not because of their religious affiliation, but because they decided to join the OPIC, which, in his view, automatically made them renounce their indigenous identity. According to him, by this act they lost their "sense of belonging to the community and ethnic consciousness and the degree of integration with the community", an argument the Court accepted.

In addition, the Governor asserted that the decision was both legal and legitimate, because it was made through an agreement of the indigenous assembly, and because it was taken within the framework of the constitutional provisions for indigenous autonomy and the special indigenous jurisdiction. Furthermore, he mentioned that the families were given six months to leave and were offered a financial compensation, observing there was no obligation to do so considering that land titles are collective, and the plaintiffs were no longer entitled to the benefits of this land because of their affiliation to the OPIC.

In fact, in all court cases involving human rights abuses related to freedom of religion, the cabildos consistently refer to their constitutional prerogatives, making the point that anything that happens inside their resguardos occurs within the framework of indigenous autonomy, and that therefore the decisions of the cabildos are legitimate. This is also the case in the above-mentioned Sentence T-659/2013, where the Colombian Constitutional Court confirms the decision of the cabildos to expel families who had joined the OPIC from their land in virtue of the indigenous autonomy, but not without observing the following: "It does not escape the attention of the Court that in some cases, the exclusion of some members of indigenous communities may be unjustified and unconstitutional, as when a member of a resguardo is forced to leave the collective territory for reasons beyond his control, such as physical coercion, displacement or threats. These cases must be considered by the indigenous authorities and duly analyzed by the corresponding [indigenous] judges." This statement comes almost at the end of the sentence and has no legal consequences but seems to indicate that the Constitutional

[164] Demanda de Eduardo Camayo, representante legal del Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC), ante el Tribunal Administrativo del Cauca, Popayán, 30/10/2014.
[165] "Liberados bajo presión indígenas cristianos en el Cauca", Visión Agape, 19/04/2013.
[166] Sentencia T-659/2013, Corte Constitucional de Colombia.

Court does have concerns about human rights violations in indigenous resguardos but cannot do anything about it because it does not entertain jurisdiction over these matters in virtue of the indigenous autonomy.

It is clear that the OPIC is not at all appreciated by the cabildos. In an interview conducted by Lía Salomé Sánchez with cabildos they declared that "if the OPIC continues to organize campaigns [massive mobilization of people for evangelistic purposes], we will put all people who participate in jail. But we won't close or burn churches. If they don't obey, we will apply [physical] punishments, fuete and cepo."[167] This is an important quote, because it means that the OPIC is the central problem of the cabildos, and much less the presence of Christian churches. I have collected many more examples of human rights abuses that resulted from membership of the OPIC, including beatings, imprisonment, torture, forced displacement, and death threats.[168]

The CRIC's position has always been that anyone who disagrees with the cabildos, is free to leave the resguardos, in line with Hirschman's interpretation: "with exit either impossible or unthinkable [for members who are loyal to a group], provision is generally made in these organizations for expelling or excommunicating the individual member in certain circumstances. Expulsion can be interpreted as an instrument – one of many – which "management" uses in these organizations to restrict resort to voice by members." (1970:76) As an illustration, in one particular case, the General Assembly of an indigenous resguardo adopted the motion presented by one of its members: "If they make that decision [of joining the OPIC] they must also leave the territory, because by belonging to the other organization [the OPIC] they are ignoring our legitimate authority. And I propose that we give them 6 months."[169] This is one of the central points of disagreement with the OPIC. The members of the OPIC expressly state they do not want to leave the resguardos, but that it is the authority of the cabildos which they reject. By leaving the resguardos they would implicitly give up their indigenous identity, which is what they want to hold on to (OPIC 2009).

The position of the OPIC is that the cabildos need to be reformed, in order to implement a democratic form of government and basic rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of worship and freedom of education. It is evident from the public statements given by the founders of the OPIC at the launch of the organization that they want resources within the resguardos to be distributed fairly, which in their opinion the CRIC does not do, as I already referred to when I discussed the issue of education subsidies (threat 7).

To promote its agenda, the OPIC has organized various marches that gathered thousands of people and that have received broad media coverage.[170] The OPIC has also initiated several court cases[171] and taken part in lobby initiatives at the Colombian Congress.[172] So far, the OPIC

[167] Interviews with CO11, CO12 and CO13* (2013).
[168] Visión Agape internal report, December 2010; "Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia", Visión Agape, 16/03/2011; "Colombia: 12 Indigenous Christians freed conditionally", Visión Agape, 30/04/2013; "12 Indigenous Christians freed conditionally", Violent Incidents Database (www.violentincidents.com); ""We want to impact our regions"", Visión Agape, 22/01/2014.
[169] Acta de la tercera Asamblea General del 30/05/2010 del resguardo de Piskwe Tha Fxiw (Cuaderno 2, Folios 84-93).
[170] "Indígenas del Cauca, en contravía", *El Espectador*, 03/08/2012.
[171] "Colombia's Indigenous Christians Go to Court", *Visión Agape*, 22/05/2012.
[172] "Colombia's indigenous believers denounce abuses in Open Doors Forum", *Visión Agape*, 17/12/2012.

has not been too successful in promoting reforms of the cabildo government system and creating opportunities for alternative confessional education.

There are rumors that say that former (Conservative) President Álvaro Uribe – who has been critical of the current regime of indigenous autonomy – is behind the creation of the OPIC, but it is not clear whether this is really the case or just an accusation that was made by members of the CRIC to discredit the OPIC.[173] Colombian scholar Carlos Andrés Ramírez Escobar (2015) rejects this accusation by pointing to the Evangelical origins of the organization which led it to identify ideologically with Uribe and the political right, but that this does not mean the OPIC has been co-opted by it. Ramírez Escobar recognizes, however, that the OPIC and the Uribe presidency were political allies against the "hegemonic" pretensions of the CRIC. Whatever the case, it is evident that the OPIC is a highly controversial organization, and that its membership is considered as "subversive" by the CRIC.[174]

Threat 10: Intimidation to prevent political participation

A number of cultural dissidents have participated in politics, standing for local or national offices. Ana Silvia Secué, one of the leaders of the OPIC ran for a senatorial seat in 2014. Pastor Hermes Pete, who is not affiliated to the OPIC, created the *Proyecto Social Cristiano [Christian Social Project]* to participate in a municipal election in the municipality of Belálcazar, in which indigenous and *mestizo (persons of mixed race)* candidates were fielded. These political bids were unsuccessful.

In all cases in which Christians attempt to participate in politics, they are vehemently opposed by the cabildos. Cultural dissidents who have decided to stand for election or to get involved in political parties have been intimidated to desist from these projects. In the best case, the political activity of Hermes Pete "created trouble for us with the cabildo."[175] Ana Silvia Secué's senatorial campaign, which revolved around her demands for freedom of education, led her to be threatened with torture on several occasions by the indigenous authorities; in addition to this, her participation in politics has brought persecution to other leaders such as Rogelio Yonda, who reported he received a death threat: "The authorities have had a meeting and they agreed to kill you because you are participating in politics. As you have bodyguards, we will send assassins."[176]

Conclusions

The threats discussed in this threat assessment reveal a clear pattern. When indigenous Christians refuse to obey the orders of the indigenous leaders, and display deviant semi-active and active religious behavior, they suffer human security threats including imprisonment, forced displacement, denial of access to water, healthcare and education, confiscation of homes and farmland, torture, and even death.

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[173] "Creación de nueva organización indígena en Cauca amenaza con dividir a comunidades étnicas del país", *El Tiempo*, 25/05/2009; Interviews with CO11, CO12, CO13 and Hermes Pete* (2013).
[174] Interviews with CO18 and CO19 (2013).
[175] Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).
[176] Interview with Rogelio Yonda (2015); "Participation in Politics Increases Persecution of Indigenous Believers", *Visión Agape*, 26/02/2014.

As to the reason for such hostilities, the immediate explanation that is given by most interviewees is that Christianity is considered a threat to the preservation of the indigenous culture and of social cohesion.[177] In line with Durkheim's insights on social deviance, Sébastien Fath's general observation about the tensions that are caused by the individualistic nature of especially Evangelical Christianity seems a valid explanatory factor of the vulnerability of Christian converts in the Nasa community: "In societies based on community cohesion, individual conversion preached by Evangelicals sometimes appears as a threat to the social order and can lead to discrimination and even persecution against new converts." (2017:41) Pedro Santiago Posada, the Delegate for Indigenous Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior, confirms this view:

> "[Conversion] puts the stability of the [indigenous] communities at risk, because they lose their identity as indígenas and become *campesinos* [peasants]. (…) One of the rights of the indígenas is to retain their worldview. The problem is that the Christian faith is a missionary faith, because Christians believe they own the truth and want to share this truth: The traditional indígenas feel attacked by Christian indígenas. (…) The problem is that indígenas are jealous of their traditions [and do not want to] lose their traditions and disappear as a people. That's why they cling onto them and don't allow others to change them."[178]

The image that emerges from the interviews is that, in the eyes of mainstream Nasa, conversion is not only something that leads individual Nasa to abandon or reject specific (religious) traditions of the community; it leads to a decrease of the total number of members of the community because converts are no longer considered as Nasa. The text of a lawsuit of the CRIC reads:

> "As a consequence of [conversion], several indígenas counted in the census of the various resguardos and indigenous cabildos, have renounced together with their families to the indigenous census and to the rights that are derived by it, which generates an imminent risk of disappearance of the indigenous communities."[179]

As expected, this view is disputed by Christian Nasa who claim they can be Nasa and Christian at the same time, but this is not how community leaders look at it. As one cabildo member declared: "Anyone who leaves the indigenous tradition and embraces Christianity loses their rights."[180]

A second explanation for the violence against cultural dissidents that was consistently mentioned in my interviews is the legal situation that grants indigenous communities autonomy as an important cause for the violence against Christian converts. Indigenous leaders do not only resent the conversion of some of their members but have the legal possibility to do something about it, i.e. to punish converts for their 'mistake.' This is indeed an important issue, namely because the protection of cultural rights, in practice, trumps the individual human rights of minorities within the Nasa community, of which I provide evidence in this threat assessment.

[177] Interview with Miguel Pérez (2012).
[178] Interview with Pedro Santiago Posada* (2013).
[179] Lawsuit by Eduardo Camayo, legal representative of the CRIC, before the Administrative Court of Cauca, Popayán, 30/10/2014.
[180] "Indigenous Pastor Poisoned; Abuses against Christians Continue in Colombia", Visión Agape, 16/03/2011.

Notwithstanding these explanations, the attitude of many cultural dissidents could also be labeled as provocative, both in the aggressive way they seek to make converts and because of the accusations they make about the cabildos. Pastor Hermes Pete suggests that the uncompromising and judgmental attitude of many converts has led to tensions:

> "It's not correct that Evangelicals try to impose their views on others. For example, they tell you to cut your hair, because the Bible says it's a sin. And that's what bothered the cabildos, especially the Movimiento Misionero Mundial [World Missionary Movement], who attacks everyone, saying that wearing earrings or bracelets or makeup is a sin. This annoyed the cabildos, because they said that we were killing the culture. The problem was they were trying to impose a legalistic gospel. Even going out to eat with them was considered a sin."[181]

During my field trips, I was able to observe this myself. The type of Christianity that most Nasa Christians follow does indeed seem to be quite intransigent and outright disrespectful of Nasa traditions. This can of course never be a justification for any human rights violation against them, but it does indicate that the attitude of Nasa converts can be a source of tension.

The OPIC also provokes the CRIC by frequently accusing it of misusing the funds that are transferred to the resguardos by the central government. I was not able to determine whether this accusation is founded, but the fact that it is made understandably upsets the CRIC. In addition, the OPIC, which wants a piece of the cake itself, accuses the CRIC to oppose conversions for material reasons, alleging that money transfers from the central government to the cabildos are reduced when the conversion of a member of a resguardo to another religion is followed by its de-registration from the 'indigenous census.' I was not able to confirm the veracity of this accusation either, but the fact that these accusations are made and that the conflict is being fought out in the media and in the courts, undoubtedly exacerbates the tensions.[182]

To summarize, in the threat assessment I have made the case that cultural dissidents are indeed vulnerable to suffer human rights abuses, both because of their religious identity (conversion) and because of their behavior (social activism and missionary activity). This being said, it cannot be denied that the attitude of the cultural dissidents is often perceived as a provocation by the cabildos. Provocation is by no means a justification for any human rights abuse, but it should invite a self-reflection by cultural dissidents about their statements and actions.

Claiming the right to religious freedom will not provide the solution as long as it is not recognized that the conflict opposing the cultural dissidents and the cabildos is not only religious or cultural, but also political and material, a distinction that has little relevance anyway in the holistic indigenous worldview in which politics and religion blend together. In other words, the animosity between the cabildos and the cultural dissidents can be considered as both grievance-based and greed-based. Indeed, many forms of religious behavior of indigenous Christians are not limited to following Christian traditions or to presenting the Christian faith. In many cases, it also implies an invitation to leave the CRIC and to join the OPIC and is therefore seen as political subversion. For example, Jaime Tenorio's

[181] Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).
[182] Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué (2012) and María Teresa Mesa (2014); "Colombia's Indigenous Christians Go to Court", Visión Agape, 05/22/12.

imprisonment, allegedly because of made up charges, could be interpreted as a reprisal for preaching the Gospel, but it was also a punishment for his invitation to join the political opposition to the indigenous leaders and to reject traditional indigenous education.[183] Similarly, a Christian school is not just a teaching facility but also a new Christian society, outside the influence of the cabildos. Refusing to take part in indigenous rituals is more than just believers exercising their right to freedom of religious expression, or freedom of worship. Both are political statements that signal that cultural dissidents no longer submit to the authority of the cabildos.

Speaking about Mexico, but with obvious similarities for Colombia, sociologist José Refugio Arrellano Sánchez explains:

> "The traditional indigenous form of social organization should be viewed as an intra-structure within the general structure. It incorporates political and religious elements, without separating them. Religious celebrations give meaning to the community. The problem is that Evangelical Christians do not have community celebrations, only private ones. The organization of celebrations is used for both political and religious reasons. It is a requirement to be part of the council of elders. The phonetic translation of the indigenous languages is also problematic because it leads Evangelicals to abandon many indigenous traditions (syncretism). Both Catholics and Evangelicals have political interests. It's a confrontation of forces in which all parties want to control land depending on their preferred social structure."[184]

6.4.2 Specificity assessment

Figure 6.3 categorizes the ten identified threats to which cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos are vulnerable by their degree of specificity to this religious minority. As can be observed, four threats have a high degree of specificity, three threats have a medium degree of specificity and three threats have a low degree of specificity. In the following I provide a justification for this categorization.

6.3 Specificity assessment of threats against cultural dissidents in Nasa resguardos (Colombia)

Degree of specificity	Identified threats
High	Aggression as a result of conversion
	Violent assaults against church attenders
	Violent assaults against people engaging in missionary activity
	Restriction of initiatives to establish Christian education
Medium	Reprisals for refusing to participate in traditional indigenous rituals
	Reprisals for rejecting traditional indigenous education
	Exclusion of access to agricultural lands
Low	Recruitment of youths into criminal organizations
	Intimidation of members of interest groups
	Intimidation to prevent political participation

Source: own elaboration.

[183] Interview with Ferney Tenorio (2012).
[184] Interview with José Refugio Arellano Sánchez (2016).

Threats with a high degree of specificity

The four threats with a high degree of specificity cover the full continuum of religious identity and behavior: "Conversion", which is essentially a change of religious identity, the semi-active behavior "Church attendance" and the more active behavior "Missionary activity" and "Initiatives to establish Christian education." The reason why I gave these threats a high degree of specificity is because they correspond to what could be considered as traditional aspects of the Christian faith in the family, church and education spheres. I did not find any evidence that other religious or non-religious minorities adopt similar patterns of religious identity and behavior. The vulnerability to these threats can therefore be considered as specific to indigenous Christians.

Threats with a medium degree of specificity

Most threats with a medium degree of specificity concern semi-active religious behavior, namely religious lifestyle such as the "Refusal to participate in traditional indigenous rituals" and the "Rejection of traditional indigenous education." These forms of religious behavior are a direct extension of the religious convictions of indigenous Christians who consider both indigenous rituals and indigenous education as things to steer clear from. These threats, although specific to indigenous Christians, could also apply to other non-Christian indigenous groups or individuals who decide to oppose traditions or display deviant behavior for any other reason, although I did not encounter such cases. The threat "Exclusion of access to agricultural lands" was also given a medium degree of specificity because, although it could happen to any group that confronts the authority of the cabildos, in practice I only found evidence of this happening to cultural dissidents.

Threats with a low degree of specificity

The three threats with a low degree of specificity can be expected to affect all people living in indigenous resguardos, because of the high degree of arbitrariness involved in indigenous justice and the lack of respect for basic human rights, as was discussed. Forms of civic participation such as "Membership of interest groups" and "Participation in politics", when this defies the power of the indigenous cabildos, are a source of vulnerability, whether this is done by a religious minority as a result of their religious convictions, or by any other group or individual.

The threat "Recruitment of youths into criminal organizations" was categorized as a threat with a low degree of specificity because it is applicable to all indigenous youths in a context in which guerrillas are always in need of new recruits. If there would be convincing evidence that indigenous Christians are specifically targeted by this threat for their religious identity or behavior, as the OPIC claims, its degree of specificity would go up one level.

Conclusions

This specificity assessment reveals that there is an observable specificity to the vulnerability of cultural dissidents, which is related to both their religious identity and various forms of semi-

active and active religious behavior. Some threats are shared with other minorities – if they would exist –, and some threats are applicable to the whole of the population.

To assess the degree of specificity for many of the human security threats the multifaceted nature and significance of the various forms of religious behavior must be considered. For example, the opposition to missionary activity by the Nasa cabildos should be seen as a combination of two elements: their desire to protect their culture against foreign influences and religions, but also their discomfort with cultural dissidents making accusations that undermine their authority. Part of this is very specific to Christian converts, and part of this is applicable to any form of behavior that threatens the moral authority of the cabildos.

It is a legitimate question whether Christian converts suffer hostilities because of their religious convictions or just because they are members of the OPIC. In response to this question, I would first of all like to remind that the threats described in previous sections apply to all Christian converts, regardless of their membership of the OPIC, and also apply to church-related aspects of religious behavior such as church attendance. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the OPIC is often seen by the cabildos as the main spokesperson of the indigenous Christian community, which contributes to the increment of the enmity between traditional Nasa and Christian Nasa. It would be fair to say that the OPIC creates trouble for indigenous Christians who are not members of this organization.[185] Whether membership of this interest group could be considered as a form of active religious behavior might also be questioned. In my opinion the answer to this question should be affirmative, as it is an integral part of the religious view of most cultural dissidents to actively promote their development vision for the Nasa resguardos through interest groups such as the OPIC.

The question whether vulnerability as a result of membership of the OPIC, and more broadly the social and political activism of the cultural dissidents, should reasonably be considered as a violation of religious freedom refers to a broader debate I evoked in the introduction to this research when I observed that religion should be considered as a factor, among other factors, of the vulnerability of religious minorities. The agenda of the cultural dissidents is indeed political, but this does not necessarily imply that religion does not play a role in the conflict with the cabildos. As I stated, 'pure' religious conflicts are the exception, and therefore a multifactorial approach should be favored. Moreover, although the agenda of the cultural dissidents is political, it is a logical extension of their religious convictions. This all implies that there is indeed a specificity to the vulnerability of this religious minority that is attributable to religious factors.

6.4.3 Resilience assessment

I now proceed with the third step of the RM-VAT, which is the resilience assessment. This section draws on information presented in the two previous assessments, but also relies on additional empirical data. I specifically look at the mechanisms and resources used by cultural dissidents to cope with the human security threats described in the threat assessment. After describing these coping mechanisms, I formulate some conclusions.

[185] Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué, Rogelio Yonda (2012), and Hermes Pete* (2013).

Coping mechanisms

Following the framework that was developed in chapter 4, I categorize coping mechanisms in eight clusters. As I show, these mechanisms are relatively underdeveloped or lacking in many cases.

Avoidance

Although social and political activism of cultural dissidents is quite developed as I argued in the threat assessment, a number of Christian converts prefer to avoid any trouble by not joining the OPIC or similar interest groups, and more generally not opposing the cabildos publicly. This strategy, however, has not always reduced their vulnerability because, as I explained, the OPIC is often confused with Christianity as a whole, implying that even Christians who are not members of the OPIC are also vulnerable to suffer human rights abuses.[186]

Spiritual endurance

For many cultural dissidents, their Christian faith gives them the moral strength to cope with the human rights abuses they suffer as a result of their religious identity and behavior. This psychological or emotional resilience is evident in many of the interviews I conducted and other data I collected, with many Christians affirming the strength and courage their faith gives them, by saying things like: "The difference is that I'm not afraid."[187] In other words, religious convictions do seem to give indigenous Christians an increased self-awareness that helps them to cope with adverse circumstances. Indeed, the radicalism of indigenous Christians is at the same time a source of vulnerability and of resilience. Pedro Santiago Posada explains: "Christians are radical and only radical people are capable of enduring the radicalism of indígenas who aren't Christians."[188]

Compliance

Many of the cultural dissidents I described in the threat assessment rebel against the cabildos, antagonistically promoting their educational agenda and spreading their accusations of abuse of funds. Whilst this is an attitude of many cultural dissidents, I have also referenced reports of cultural dissidents who, after receiving threats or suffering punishments, agreed to leave their land or decided to submit to the authority of the cabildos. To avoid further threats, cultural dissidents have ceased their opposition to traditional indigenous education and traditional indigenous rituals. A number of them have also withdrawn from social and political activism.

Social wisdom

I found social wisdom as a coping mechanism to be completely lacking for most cultural dissidents, especially the ones who are affiliated to the OPIC who embarked on an

[186] Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).
[187] Interviews with Ana Silvia Secué (2010) and CO18 (2013); "The Indigenous Women of Cauca's Nasa People", *Visión Agape*, 17/06/2012; ""The Gospel keeps me free in jail": Jaime Tenorio", Visión Agape, 06/11/2013.
[188] Interview with Pedro Santiago Posada* (2013).

uncompromising confrontational path against the cabildos, not realizing, or perhaps not willing to realize, that although their demands may be legitimate, their attitude is unnecessarily provocative. The outcome of the strategy of the OPIC has for the most part been counterproductive. Not only were their demands not considered, they contributed to a further deterioration of personal relations in the community. By publicly confronting the cabildos and so fiercely rejecting traditions that are so important to them, some interviewees are of the opinion that cultural dissidents actually fuel the conflict with the cabildos:

> "The problem is that the cabildo has begun to act because they [the cultural dissidents] provoked them. They speak badly of the cabildo. They stood behind their pulpits to discriminate the cabildos, saying that only those who were in the OPIC were the ones that were going to receive Salvation, and those who were not in the OPIC were going to hell."[189]

The only exception I found was Pastor Hermes Pete who seemed more conciliatory and open to dialogue with the cabildos to explore a consensual solution.

Moral standing

Moral standing could be a valid coping mechanism, if this recourse is used properly, that is avoiding provocation. Pastor Hermes Pete's strategy to address issues with the cabildos could be used as an example. His strategy is not only less confrontational but seems to be effective to actually change things:

> "It's true that the cabildos have at times mismanaged public funds, but that doesn't mean they were stealing money. (…) As Evangelicals, we should not criticize. I believe it's better to help the person and tell him: 'this should not be done this way; that should be done that way.' I have a good relationship with the cabildos which gives me the opportunity to talk to them when they need to correct things."[190]

Moral standing is at the core of the activities of most cultural dissidents. Indeed, many of them loudly voice their disagreement with cultural practices and public policies that they consider contradictory to the Christian faith, as I described in the threat assessment. Whilst it is courageous 'to stand up for what is right', I did not find moral standing to be a coping mechanism for most cultural dissidents, but rather a source of vulnerability.

Solidarity

Solidarity from NGO's and to some extent Colombian church organizations has benefited cultural dissidents. In recent years, organizations such as Visión Agape have provided humanitarian assistance, supplied microloans, financed legal procedures, provided land after forced displacement, and opened a safe house for people who were forced to flee their resguardo. The sense of community among Nasa Christians is also quite developed, with fellow Nasa Christians helping each other, sharing food and other supplies. This solidarity has contributed to mitigate the impact of the human security threats to which cultural dissidents

[189] Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).
[190] Interview with Hermes Pete* (2013).

have been exposed. The institutional capacity of Nasa churches is nevertheless limited, and not comparable to the diaconal services of Western church institutions. In my interviews, Ana Silvia Secué further indicated that training in civic rights has been of use for the educational and political initiatives she has led. Thanks to a basic understanding of the law, she says she has been able to fight legal battles and to advocate for the rights of Nasa Christians with the national government.

Collective action

Contrary to actively practicing Christians in the states of NL, TS and SP in Mexico, where collective action is largely lacking, the collective action of cultural dissidents in the Nasa resguardos is very developed. Through different strategies, including the activities of the OPIC, political participation, lawsuits, lobby efforts in partnership with Colombian church associations, a strong presence in national media and contacts with international organizations, cultural dissidents have tried to promote their agenda and to address issues they disagree with.

Just as is the case with moral standing, collective action has not really been a coping mechanism for cultural dissidents, but rather an additional source of vulnerability. This can be explained mainly by their "adversarial logic", which Vargas & Petri define as an "opposition logic that does not allow social actors to participate constructively in concertation processes" (2009). This adversarial logic can to a large extent be attributed to the "legacy of Christian missions", to use the concept of Nigerian scholar Yusufu Turaki, which he uses to describe the attitude of the church in North Nigeria toward social and political action, which is a direct result of the teachings of British missionaries who christened them (2010). José Casanova speaks of the risks of "culturally insensitive proselytizing" (2008). In the case of the Nasa in Colombia, the missionaries that presented the Christian faith to them, quite explicitly encouraged them to reject their 'pagan' heritage, and to use such insensitive and judgmental language, which is a direct cause of the current tensions, as Pedro Santiago Posada argues:

> "The Christians who are part of the OPIC have wanted to impose their truth on the cabildos, and the cabildos oppose them to preserve their cultural identity through their customs and habits. (...) Analyzing this issue requires reflecting on a dominant factor which is that the indígenas have been warned against beliefs other than their own, because when the first religious congregations arrived they began to take away their territories and told them that all they practiced was of the devil and not of God, an idea that was reinforced by Protestant Christians; and the indígenas are jealous of their traditions and cling onto them so as not to disappear as a people."[191]

Taking up arms

The opposition of cultural dissidents to the resguardos and the policies of the cabildos is mainly expressed through their moral standing as well as through various forms of collective action, which includes using legal and political channels (non-violent self-defense mechanisms). I did not come across any evidence of cultural dissidents who have taken up arms, or created self-defense militias. Some leaders of the CRIC have accused the OPIC of having links with paramilitary groups, but I have not found any evidence for this accusation. If this were true,

[191] Interview with Pedro Santiago Posada* (2014).

this would mean that some cultural dissidents do use the strategy of taking up arms as a coping mechanism.

Moreover, notwithstanding the legitimacy of some of the objectives of the OPIC, it must be recognized that some members of the OPIC occasionally do engage in violence against indigenous authorities.[192] This being said, it could very well be that the violence committed by members of the OPIC really was in self-defense or that charges against OPIC members are fabricated.[193]

Conclusions

The vulnerability of cultural dissidents is to a large extent structural. The political activity of Christian converts in the Nasa resguardos is certainly a risk increasing factor, but the situation described in the threat assessment revealed that even the less active forms of religious behavior such as church attendance already have an important political meaning that causes vulnerability. Moreover, as discussed, this religious behavior of cultural dissidents often poses a direct threat to the political and economic interests of the cabildos.

At first sight, when observing the social and political activism of the cultural dissidents, it might seem that the coping mechanisms of the cultural dissidents are quite developed. However, because this activism is so confrontational and lacks social wisdom, it actually increases the vulnerability of this religious minority. The spiritual endurance of the cultural dissidents is perhaps their greatest coping mechanism, but it turns into a pitfall when it is combined with a stubborn and judgmental attitude.

As explained above, the sense of belonging (loyalty) to the Nasa ethnic group of the cultural dissidents, makes 'voice', to use Hirschman's category once again, their primary way to express dissent (1970). This does not mean, however, that the way the cultural dissidents express 'voice' is effective. Although 'voice' is certainly used with greater determination, it is not necessarily used with greater creativity or resourcefulness, let alone with social wisdom.

6.5 Evaluation

In this section, I present an evaluation of the application of the findings of this case study. I consecutively discuss its contributions (6.5.1) and limitations (6.5.2).

6.5.1 Contributions

Three findings stand out as empirical contributions of this case study. The first concerns the centrality of the matter of freedom of education in the conflict between the cultural dissidents and the cabildos. As the threat assessment shows, the claim for freedom of confessional education is the primary point of contention in the Nasa resguardos, leading to severe human rights abuses, even more so than freedom of worship. The latter also leads to human security threats, but the conflict crystallizes around the matter of freedom of education. The conflict reflects the confrontation between two worldviews: the traditional worldview of the cabildos

[192] Idem.
[193] Interview with CO24 (2013).

organized in the CRIC, who are concerned about the preservation of their indigenous heritage, and the worldview of the cultural dissidents, represented by the OPIC, who refuse to include what they view as "pagan" religious traditions in the educational curriculum of their children.

Presented this way, the conflict seems a typical "value conflict", but greed-based or "political economy" considerations also play a role. Indeed, freedom of education is also a matter of political power and of access to resources. Education is a symbol of political authority, because it has implications for the 'indigenous census', which is the count of inhabitants in a particular resguardo which determines the height of money transfers for education from the central government. The OPIC challenges this system of subsidies, making claims to these funds as well. Both grievance-based and greed-based interpretations of the conflict are thus relevant.

The matter of freedom of education also illustrates the relevance of the open-ended feature of the RM-VAT, because it made it possible to consider the (in part) non-religious motives of the cabildos that are responsible for the vulnerability of cultural dissidents as well as to observe human security threats related to religious expression in all spheres of society, including, in this case, in the social sphere.

The second finding concerns the counterproductive manner in which a subgroup of the cultural dissidents, the ones who are affiliated with the OPIC, have dealt with the matter of religious freedom. As I found, the intensity and frequency of some human security threats has increased by an attitude that is confrontational, verbally aggressive and at times outright provocative. This attitude, which could be the result of missionary work that was not culturally sensitive or a reflection of the excessive zeal of new converts, is not conducive to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This does not excuse the perpetrators of the human rights abuses in any way but it does invite a self-reflection on behalf of the cultural dissidents about their attitude. This point also emerges in the resilience assessment, where I establish that the collective action of the cultural dissidents does not increase their resilience but on the contrary makes them more vulnerable because it is generally devoid from the necessary social wisdom as a coping mechanism.

From an analytical perspective, this point also underlines the importance of making a clear distinction between the observation of human security threats and their interpretation. The finding that the cultural dissidents are, in part, responsible for the deterioration of their human security situation because of the provocative attitude of some members of this group, should not stand in the way of an unbiased observation of human security threats because this could lead to discard the vulnerability of this group because "it's their own fault", as a Mexican church leader once told me about a very similar case in an indigenous community in Mexico.[194]

A third, methodological, contribution of this case study is the finding that court cases constitute a useful source of information about this much politicized conflict in which impartial sources are difficult to find and conducting fieldwork is complex. Because I did not have the possibility of speaking to cabildos myself, I turned to relevant court cases in order to obtain their representations of the conflict. The court cases also allowed me to gain a broader understanding of the conflicting rights, beyond the particular versions that my interviewees gave me.

[194] Interview with Cirilo Cruz (2015).

6.5.2 Limitations

I would like to mention four limitations I faced in this case study. The first is related to the conduct of the fieldwork. Because the interviewees are to a considerable extent influenced by their perceptions, it was challenging to distinguish opinion from objective facts. Moreover, the recurrent confusion in the minds of the interviewees between the purpose of an interest group and a religious denomination – the amalgam of politics and religion –, was a very important finding for this research. Similarly, when indigenous Christians speak of setting up a Christian school, or any other religious building, it was difficult to discern their intentions. For example, I found that when they spoke about their religious rights, they also imply the access to self-administrated land and money transfers from the Colombian government. In other words, because of the contradictory and partial statements of many primary sources, interpretation was at times challenging, however, the fact that human rights abuses actually occurred can nevertheless be objectively established.

Second, from a methodological point of view I encountered some issues related to the way spheres of society are understood within the indigenous context. For the sake of comparing between case studies, the approach in terms of spheres of society was maintained, but in the context of indigenous territories, this perspective is not necessarily applicable as the difference between some spheres is blurred (church, social, government) and some spheres are not understood as separate spheres but are always viewed in relation to other spheres (business, cultural).

Third, a major limitation of my fieldwork was the fact that I was not able to speak with cabildos and other, non-Evangelical Nasa. I tried to overcome this problem by integrating other available materials such as jurisprudence, news reports, internal reports of NGO's and interviews conducted by others to mend the gaps in the information I collected through my fieldwork and to confront different opinions about the conflict.

Finally, it can be observed that while the RM-VAT was instrumental to observe human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable, a proper context description is nevertheless necessary in order to understand the factors of this vulnerability, in particular the description of the legal-political prerogatives of the cabildos.